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1 — Senate shelves $81 million disaster-relief bill until January, San Antonio Express-News, 12/21/17
http://www.expressnews.com/news/local/article/Congress-delays-disaster-relief-bill-12448938.php
Lawmakers in both House and Senate averted a government shutdown by approving a stopgap spending bill that will fund the federal bureaucracy through Jan. 19. But after the House approved a long-sought $81 billion disaster-relief package for victims of Hurricane Harvey and other natural disasters, Senate leaders said they wouldn't take up the measure until January — a bitter setback for the Texas delegation.

2 — Trump's Busy Year On Energy And Environment, NPR, 12/22/17
https://www.npr.org/2017/12/22/570548757/trumps-busy-year-on-energy-and-environment
On energy and environment, Trump is slowly making headway, with help from a trio of powerful and like-minded cabinet members.

3 — Trump administration halts study of offshore oil inspections, Baton Rouge Advocate, 12/21/17
http://www.theadvocate.com/baton_rouge/news/business/article_55955c54-e6ad-11e7-af03-2f9a4968d5d3.html
The Trump administration has halted an independent scientific study of offshore oil inspections by a federal safety agency created after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon drilling rig fire killed 11 men off the Louisiana coast and dumped millions of barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

4 — Toxic Trouble: Hundreds of Superfund sites face flood risks, San Antonio Express-News, 12/22/17
http://www.mysanantonio.com/news/article/Toxic-Trouble-Hundreds-of-Superfund-sites-face-12447447.php
Nearly 2 million people in the U.S. live within a mile of 327 Superfund sites in areas prone to flooding or vulnerable to rising seas caused by climate change, according to an Associated Press analysis of flood zone maps, census data and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency records.

5 — EPA honors local Native Americans, Houma (LA) Courrier, 12/21/17
http://www.houmatoday.com/news/20171221/epa-honors-local-native-americans
A local band of Native Americans was recently named the recipient of an award from the federal government for their efforts to preserve their culture.

6 — Acoma Pueblo will get federal aid to repair flood damage, Albuquerque Journal, 12/21/17
https://www.abqjournal.com/1109611/trump-declares-disaster-on-acoma-pueblo.html
The Pueblo of Acoma has received a federal promise of aid to help residents recover from October floods that tore up roads and bridges.

7 — Homeland Security suspends bioterrorism tests after public and tribal opposition, The Oklahoman, 12/21/17
https://newsok.com/homeland-security-suspends-bioterrorism-tests-after-public-and-tribal-opposition/article/5576851
The Department of Homeland Security said Thursday it will suspend nonhazardous bioterrorism tests slated to start in February along the Oklahoma-Kansas border following a public outcry and opposition from area tribes.

8 — Odessa Stinks! (Literally.), Texas Monthly, 12/21/17
https://www.texasmonthly.com/articles/odessa-stinks-literally/
The oil field, it is said, smells, but it smells like money. Part of the price of living in a boomtown like Odessa is learning to tolerate the strange odors that accompany oil and gas production, like the rotten-egg smell of hydrogen sulfide. But the stench that descended on east Odessa over the past year is something else entirely.

9 — High-end green home community planned for Frisco would cover roofs with native plants, Dallas Morning News, 12/22/17
https://www.dallasnews.com/business/real-estate/2017/12/22/new-green-home-community-frisco-cover-roofs-native-plants
Developers like to brag about their "green" construction projects. But a development proposed in Frisco takes the concept to a whole different level.

Senate shelves $81 million disaster-relief bill until January

By Kevin Diaz, Washington Bureau | December 21, 2017 | Updated: December 21, 2017 8:23pm

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Photo: Mark Wilson / Getty Images

Members of the House of Representatives leave for Christmas break.

WASHINGTON — Lawmakers in both House and Senate began heading home for the holidays Thursday after averting a government shutdown by approving a stopgap spending bill that will fund the federal bureaucracy through Jan. 19.

But after the House approved a long-sought $81 billion disaster-relief package for victims of Hurricane Harvey and other natural disasters, Senate leaders said they wouldn't take up the measure until January — a bitter setback for the Texas delegation.

"This has been a painful season for so many of us, from California to Texas to Florida and Louisiana, Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands," Houston Democrat Sheila Jackson Lee said before the vote on disaster aid. "So I am still here begging my colleagues for those who are begging in Texas."

Heading off a shutdown, the House voted 231-188 for the stopgap funding measure. The Senate passed the same bill later Thursday 66-32.

It provides money for the popular Children's Health Insurance Program, but was stripped of language on long-term spending, immigration, and disaster relief — all contentious issues that threatened gridlock and a government shutdown.

The House also voted 251-169 for the storm relief package. But Senate leaders cited procedural rules that could delay consideration for days and put off the vote until January.

That's when Congress returns to battle over the budget, military spending, and the legal status of "Dreamers," immigrants brought into the country illegally as children.

Texas lawmakers vowed to keep pushing for the federal storm relief, which ultimately fell victim to year-end spending budget maneuvers — as well as a midnight Friday deadline to continue funding for the federal government.

"Christmas Day marks four months since Harvey made landfall," said U.S. Rep. Randy Weber, whose Galveston-area district was among the hardest hit. "We must focus on getting our neighbors the help they so desperately need."

Houston Mayor Sylvester Turner urged federal officials to act quickly at a Thursday news conference, flanked by three Houstonians whose homes were flooded during Harvey and are facing more challenges than they have the resources to handle.

"Just proposing an amount doesn't buy one roofing shingle or drywall section," he said. "Today, the House was considering approval of the package but the Senate was not. We still need Washington to act on the pressing needs of Houstonians as we work towards a full recovery and resiliency."

While expressing sympathy for Texas and other storm-ravaged areas, lawmakers on both sides of the political divide found things not to like in the proposed aid package: conservatives argued that it wouldn't be accompanied by spending cuts in other parts of the budget; liberals objected that the funding would be insufficient to meet the needs of storm victims, particularly citizens in hard-hit Puerto Rico and the Caribbean.

"It treats Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands as second-class citizens," New York Democrat Joseph Crowley said.

For Republicans, votes were cast in the shadow of opposition from Heritage Action, a conservative group that argued the proposed disaster aid would add to deficits without meeting the strict definition of "emergency spending."

Amid late concerns that the disaster request could sink the must-pass stopgap funding measure, GOP leaders chose to separate the two measures, leaving the storm package to stand on its own.

'It's maddening'

The Texas delegation, including Republican Sens. John Cornyn and Ted Cruz, had long sought a standalone aid package, which they had hoped would win bipartisan support by the end of the year.

Cruz lamented the Senate's inaction in a floor speech reminding his colleagues that hundreds of thousands of storm victims are spending Christmas in hotels, shelters and other forms of temporary housing.

"They're waiting, counting on our help," Cruz said. "It's wrong. Indeed, it's maddening."

Cornyn placed blame for the failure on Senate Democrats, who "are refusing to cooperate."

Houston Republican John Culberson, who had also demanded a standalone vote, still called the House vote "a tremendous step in the right direction."

In the end, the House aid package was opposed by 51 Republicans and 118 Democrats. Only two Texans voted no: Austin Democrat Lloyd Doggett and Dallas Republican Jeb Hensarling.

Hensarling, citing fiscal concerns, had voted against a previous disaster bill; Doggett said that given the Senate's inaction, the House bill was "largely symbolic."

Many Democrats voted against both the stopgap government funding bill and the disaster relief in protest of GOP leaders' refusal to include Dreamer protections in a final year-end spending agreement covering government funding and disaster relief.

Both Democrats and Republicans from Texas, even those who supported the House aid package, still expressed misgivings about its size, which would be split between all the areas affected by Hurricanes Harvey, Irma and Maria, along with the western wildfires.

"Obviously, Texas doesn't do as well as I'd like," said Houston Democrat Gene Green, who wasn't present for the vote but said he supported the storm aid. "But this is also a train that's leaving the station, and I don't know when there will be another one."

'Work in progress'

The $81 billion storm aid bill would represent nearly a doubling of the $44 billion requested by the White House last month — a sum Texas Gov. Greg Abbott decried as "inadequate." But it also fell short of the $61 billion that Abbott and the Texas delegation had sought for the Gulf region alone.

Abbott's deputy communications director, Ciara Matthews, said in a statement that the governor's office still sees the proposed funding level "inadequate to address the profound needs of Texans trying to rebuild from the largest natural disaster in state history."

Texas officials have estimated the total storm damage from Harvey alone at about $180 billion, far above the $50 billion Congress has approved so far for Texas and other areas hit by this year's unprecedented series of natural disasters.

The House bill included $26 billion for community development block grants and almost $28 billion for the Federal Emergency Management Agency disaster-relief fund. It also provided $12 billion for the Army Corps of Engineers for infrastructure repairs and upgrades.

In total, the hurricane relief package would have been Congress' third since Harvey slammed into the Gulf Coast in August, and the largest ever single outlay for natural disaster assistance in the nation's history.

Mike Morris contributed from Houston and Mike Ward contributed from Austin.

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ENVIRONMENT

Trump's Busy Year On Energy And Environment

December 22, 2017 · 5:01 AM ET

ALISA BARBA

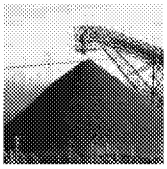
FROM INSIDE ENERGY

President Donald Trump speaks at the Energy Department in Washington, on June 29, 2017.
Susan Walsh/AP

President Trump campaigned on a platform to make American energy great again.

"We're loaded," he said, at a 2016 campaign appearance in North Dakota, referring to fossil fuel reserves. By unleashing those reserves and slashing regulations, Trump promised, he would usher in an era of "energy independence" and, ultimately, American energy dominance.

Other than the massive tax reform bill in Congress, Trump's legislative victories have so far been few and far between. On energy and environment, however, Trump is slowly making headway, with help from a trio of powerful and like-minded cabinet members.



ENERGY

Is This How The Trump Administration Might Save Coal?

Energy Secretary Rick Perry has proposed subsidizing struggling coal and nuclear electricity generating plants and has delayed measures to boost energy efficiency that were supposed to take effect this year.

The head of the Environmental Protection Agency, Scott Pruitt, has erased climate change from agency priorities and is filling the ranks of political appointees with people who have previously lobbied against a slew of environmental regulations.

Finally, at the Interior Department, Secretary Ryan Zinke is shrinking national monuments while opening up more federal lands to drilling and mining.

Here are some major actions of the Trump administration to date:

Climate and environment

Trump famously called climate change a hoax and many of his cabinet members and political appointees dismiss climate change science. The administration has moved aggressively, through executive orders and agency actions, to reverse many of the environmental regulations and rules the previous administration put into place. Some examples:

Article continues after sponsorship

A coal-burning power plant steams in Gelsenkirchen, Germany, while the 23rd UN Conference of the Parties (COP) climate talks end in Bonn, Germany on Nov. 17, 2017.

Martin Meissner/AP

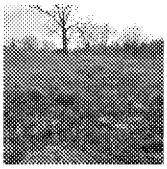
- An executive order in March ordered a review of all actions that could hinder the development and exploitation of energy resources. The order immediately revoked a host of Obama administration efforts to prepare and protect the country from the impacts of climate change.

- In compliance with that executive order, EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt announced in October that he would repeal the Clean Power Plan, which aimed to cut carbon emissions from power plants. The EPA is considering whether to issue a more limited plan to deal with power plant emissions.

- President Trump announced the U.S. will withdraw from the Paris Climate Accord. While actual withdrawal may take years, the move signaled a U.S. retreat from climate leadership and other major powers, including China and France, have stepped in to try and fill it.

- Through executive action, the White House removed climate considerations from the environmental approval process for infrastructure projects, such as roads, bridges and pipelines. It also revoked a rule requiring higher flood standards for federal infrastructure.

- President Trump signed a bill that overturned a rule preventing coal companies from dumping mining waste into local streams.



THE TWO-WAY

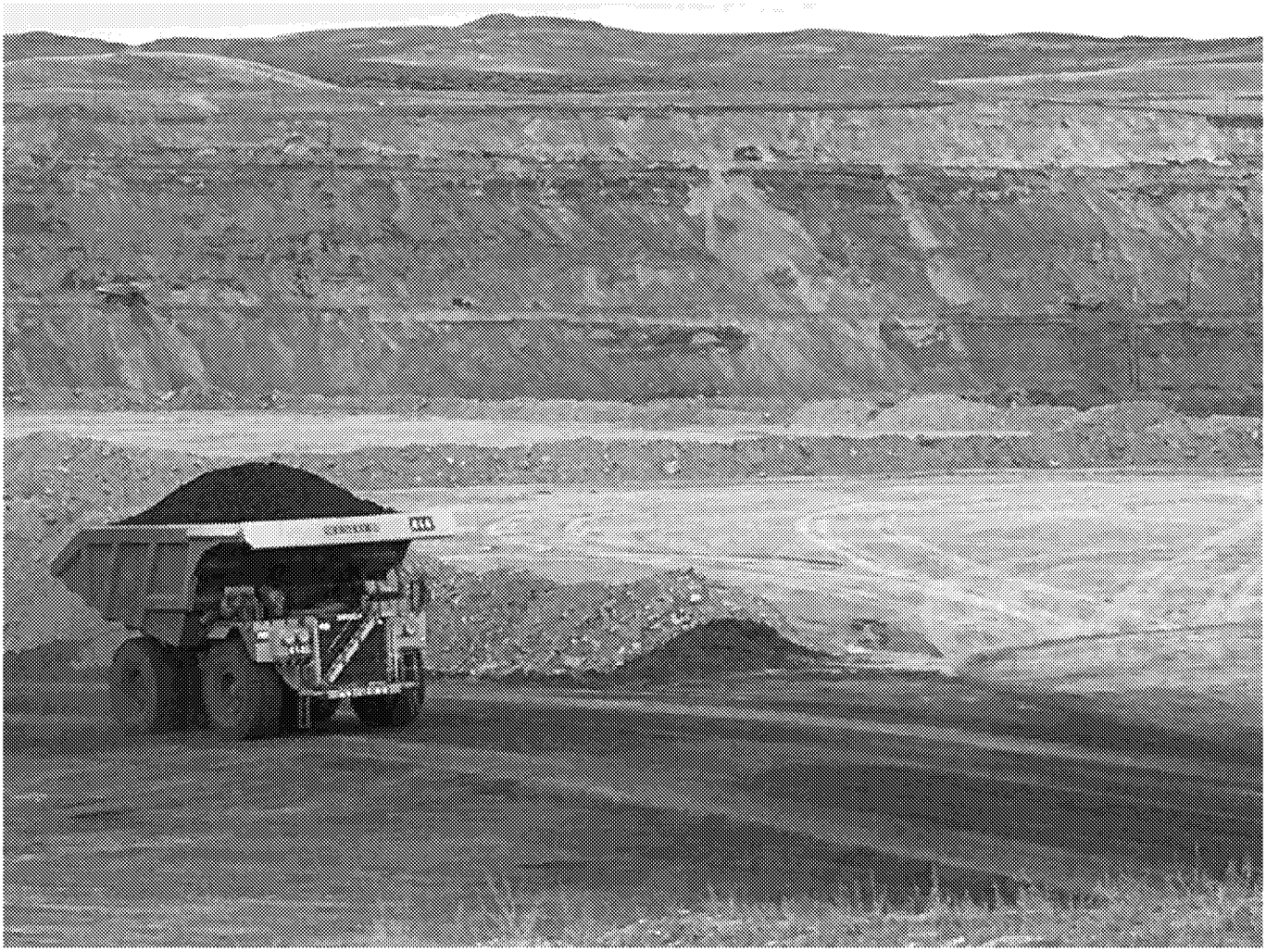
Trump Aims To 'Eliminate' Clean Water Rule

The EPA has also moved to repeal a number of rules, or put them under review with the intent to revise, including:

- A requirement for oil and gas companies to report methane emissions from existing oil and gas sources.

- A rule that would limit carbon dioxide emissions from new and modified power plants (the Clean Power Plan related to existing power plants).

- A rule to regulate the disposal of coal ash and other toxic discharges from power plants.
- A rule that would extend Clean Water Act protections for small waterways and streams.



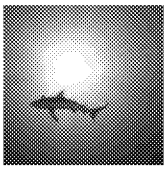
A dump truck hauls coal at Contura Energy's Eagle Butte Mine near Gillette, Wyo.

Mead Gruver/AP

Energy

The president's executive order on "Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth" called for promoting "clean and safe" development of energy resources while "avoiding regulatory burdens that unnecessarily encumber energy production." Here are a few things that have been done that aim to accomplish those goals:

- Through executive action, the president approved the much-disputed Dakota Access and Keystone XL oil pipelines.
- President Trump ordered Interior to reconsider safety regulations on offshore drilling, and an Obama administration effort to restrict drilling off the Atlantic Ocean and Alaskan coasts.



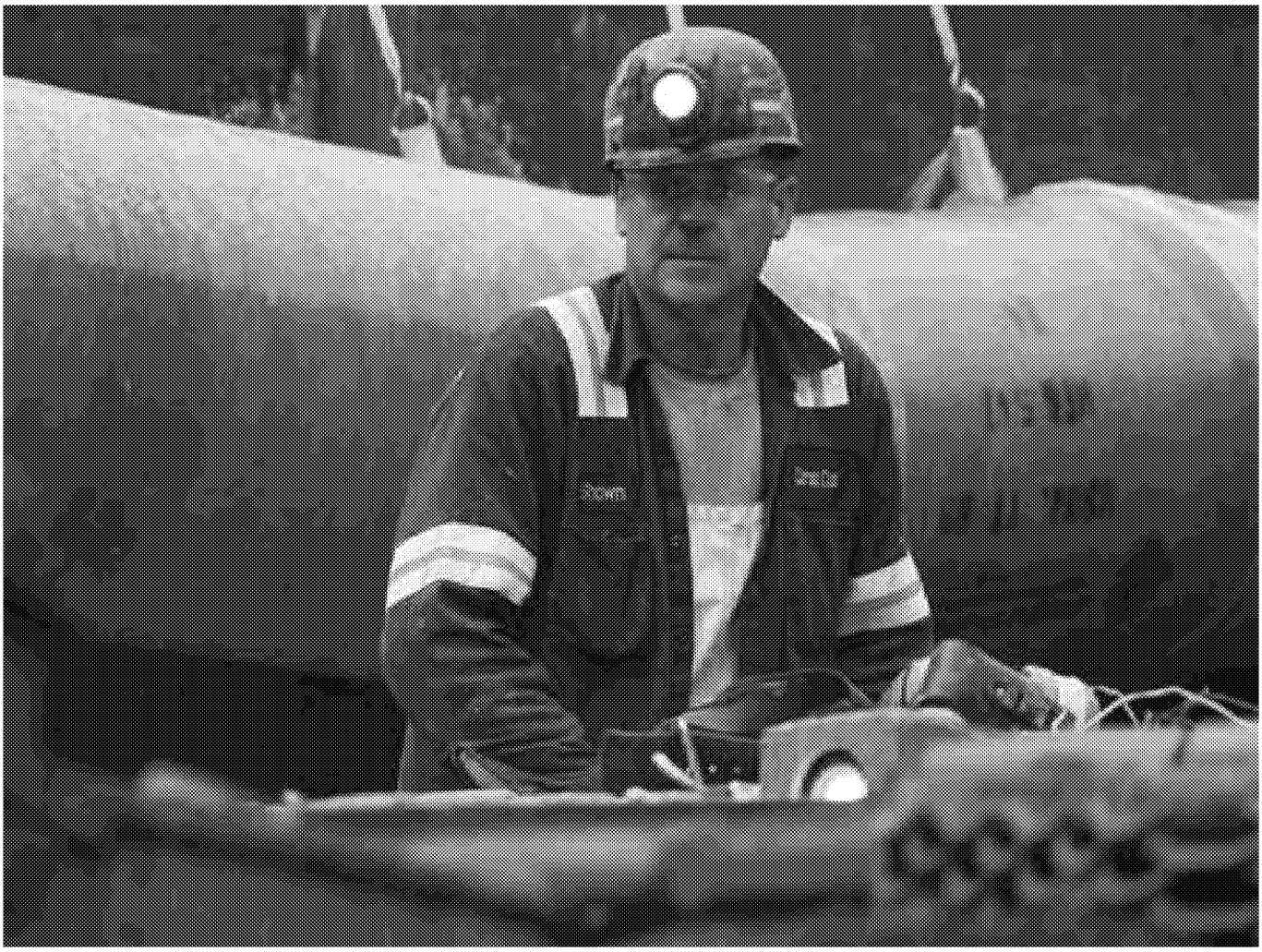
THE TWO-WAY

Trump Signs Executive Order On Offshore Drilling And Marine Sanctuaries

The Interior Department has also:

- Opened up large sections of federal land in Alaska to oil and gas drilling.
- Made it easier for mining to resume in Alaska's Bristol Bay
- Ordered a review of a plan developed by western states to keep the greater sage grouse off the endangered species list. That could likely open up more land to energy development.
- Sped up the permitting process and increased the number of lease sales for oil and gas drilling on federal land.
- Delayed implementation (with the intention of rewriting) of an Obama administration rule that sought to limit methane leaks from oil and gas drilling on federal land.
- Overturned an effort to reform how royalties were calculated for oil, gas and coal on federal lands.
- Revoked a moratorium on new coal leases on public lands.
- Recommended shrinking four national monuments and revising management plans for a half dozen more. In December, Trump announced he would dramatically shrink Bear's Ears National Monument and Grand Staircase-

Escalante — both in Utah. Removing monument protections from these lands would allow energy development, such as coal or uranium mining to continue, and possibly expand. Zinke also recommended shrinking two more national monuments and revising management plans for a half dozen more.



A coal miner in Friedens, Pa., on June 7, 2017. President Donald Trump referred to the mine's opening during a speech announcing his intent to withdraw from the Paris climate accords.

Dake Kang/AP

Long-term impact?

When President Trump was first elected, few energy analysts believed he could bring back the coal industry, or reverse the momentum of renewable energy. But, coal's fortunes have improved this past year due to a stronger export market, and the effort to repeal the Clean Power Plan. Still, experts foresee a long-term decline. Coal-fired electricity plants are too expensive compared to natural gas, and are continuing to shut down despite full-throated support from the administration. Lifting the

moratorium on new coal leases on federal land has not resulted in a single new coal lease in Wyoming, according to Travis Deti, head of the Wyoming Mining Association.

Likewise, at least some oil and gas lease sales on federal land have been met with a tepid response from industry. In December, only seven bids were received for parcels on over 10 million acres offered in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska, less than one percent of the acreage for sale. Similarly, a lease sale in Utah for 94,000 acres left 40,000 acres without an acceptable minimum bid.

ENVIRONMENT AND ENERGY COLLABORATIVE

How Tariffs Could Help And Hurt The Solar Industry

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Still, while renewable energy such as solar and wind continues to expand, some things suggest challenges ahead:

- After five years of tremendous growth, solar installations in 2017 are expected to be down 22 percent from the previous year. The slowdown is in part due to regulatory uncertainty under the Trump administration. In early 2018, Trump is set to announce his decision on whether to impose stiff trade protections on the import of cheap solar panels from Asia. The solar industry fears this could dramatically hurt growth.

- Rick Perry's coal and nuclear subsidy proposal would give those sources a financial boost in wholesale markets. The proposal is still under review at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission but, if approved, it could keep coal alive while spelling trouble for the renewable industry.

Alisa Barba is the Executive Editor of Inside Energy*, a public media collaboration focused on America's energy issues.*

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Trump administration halts study of offshore oil inspections

Advocate staff and wire report **DEC 21, 2017 - 6:16 PM**

In this June 9, 2010 file photo, a worker uses a suction hose to remove oil washed ashore from the Deepwater Horizon spill, in Belle Terre, La. The Trump administration has halted an independent scientific study of offshore oil inspections by the federal safety agency created after the 2010 spill in the Gulf of Mexico. The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine was told to cease review of the inspection program conducted by the federal Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement. Established following the massive BP spill, the bureau was assigned the role of improving offshore safety inspections and federal oversight. (AP Photo/Eric Gay, File)

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Eric Gay

The Trump administration has halted an independent scientific study of offshore oil inspections by a federal safety agency created after the 2010 Deepwater Horizon drilling rig fire killed 11 men off the Louisiana coast and dumped millions of barrels of oil into the Gulf of Mexico.

The National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine was told to cease its review of the inspection program conducted by the federal Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement, which is part of the Interior Department. Established following the massive BP spill, the bureau was assigned the role of improving offshore safety inspections and federal oversight.

The Dec. 7 bureau letter ordering the suspension of all National Academies' work under the federal contract said that within 90 days the department would decide whether to lift the order or terminate the study altogether.

Story Continued Below

Bureau spokesman Greg Julian said Thursday a new "risk-based" component to the inspection program is being developed within the bureau, and the academies study "was paused ... to allow time to ensure that there are no duplicate efforts." The bureau focus is increasing the safety of offshore oil and gas operations, he said.

The agency, which regulates offshore drilling, is led by Louisiana political veteran Scott Angelle, who was named to the post in May. Angelle is the agency's fourth director since it was established in the wake of the Deepwater Horizon disaster.

"I think this is an example of Trump demonstrating he wants to open up federal waters to more drilling at the expense of people on the planet," said the Sierra Club's Kelly Martin. "He is much more supportive of corporate polluters than protecting people's safety."

After President Donald Trump's surprise victory last year, many industry leaders and local officials in Louisiana's hard-hit oil-dependent areas were optimistic that their added costs of doing business would be reduced as the new administration focused on deregulation.

After the 2010 incident, the Obama administration had implemented dozens of new regulations, which industry officials have long criticized for adding undue costs that ultimately stunted drilling activity.

Now, some observers, including Donald Boesch, who was on the presidential oil spill commission and had a hand in shaping the post-BP spill safety reforms, expressed concern that the National Academies' study suspension was driven by "some more political motivation to not feed into a narrative of more regulations."

"We still have incidents down in the Gulf. They haven't gone away, they haven't been all stopped, and we still have people getting killed and hurt down there in the offshore industry, and we still have leaks that are happening," Boesch said. "So there's a lot of work yet to be done. I don't think that anyone can conclude that everything is just perfect the way it is."

Others have criticized BSEE for not providing enough industry oversight. In a report released in March 2016, the U.S. Government Accountability Office found the bureau "continues to rely on pre-Deepwater Horizon incident policies and procedures," which it described as "a longstanding deficiency."

The order marks the second time in four months that the Trump administration has halted a study by the National Academies. In August, the Interior Department suspended a National Academies study of potential health risks for people living near Appalachian surface coal mines.

The Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement is also tasked with improving offshore drilling environmental protections. It was established in 2011 to separate enforcement of offshore drilling from federal revenue collection and permitting to avoid possible dysfunction and conflicts in enforcement against violations.

The committee of scientists examining the inspection program held its only meeting in late October in Washington, D.C., said spokesman William Kearney. Future meetings planned for the Gulf region have been put on hold.

The ad hoc committee was tasked with taking an inward look at BSEE in order to answer questions and make recommendations to issues such as identifying a goal for the inspection program; determining how inspections can focus on risks and enhancing safety as well as compliance; determining what can be learned from offshore inspection programs in other countries; and outlining the program's key functions as far as five

and 10 years in the future.

"The National Academies are grateful to the committee members for their service and disappointed that their important study has been stopped," Kearney said Thursday.

The Interior Department headed by Secretary Ryan Zinke declined to comment on the study suspension. Spokeswoman Heather Swift said it was a bureau decision to halt the study, not a department decision.

Greenpeace spokesman Travis Nichols said there is no excuse for rolling back safeguards for workers and the environment. "The Trump administration is aggressively trying to unlearn all of the lessons of the Deepwater Horizon disaster," he said.

In August, the Interior Department's Mine Safety and Health Administration cited budget reasons for suspending the National Academies study of potential health risks to those near Appalachian surface mines. But Kearney said Thursday that other studies for the department weren't halted. That study remains on hold though the scientific group has said it ought to be continued.

"Given how important this study is to the citizens and communities surrounding these surface mining sites in Appalachia, the National Academies believe the study should be completed and are exploring options to do so," Kearney added. "Some private donors have expressed an interest in funding the completion of the study."

ASSOCIATED PRESS WRITERS MATTHEW DALY AND MICHAEL VIRTANEN AND ADVOCATE BUSINESS WRITER RICHARD THOMPSON CONTRIBUTED TO THIS REPORT.

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Residents of Isle de Jean Charles homes
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By Holly Duchmann Staff Writer
Posted Dec 21, 2017 at 8:31 PM
Updated Dec 21, 2017 at 8:31 PM

A local band of Native Americans was recently named the recipient of an award from the federal government for their efforts to preserve their culture.

The Isle de Jean Charles band of Biloxi-Chitimacha won first place in the 2017 Gulf Guardian Awards in the environmental justice and cultural diversity category for its efforts to resettle its coastal community due to land loss.

Only about 320 acres are left of Isle de Jean Charles, which officials estimate was more than 22,000 acres 60 years ago. Experts predict the island will be completely submerged within 50 years.

The project will relocate the coastal island community in Terrebonne Parish about 40 miles north, near Schriever. The move is a federally

backed community relocation, triggered by the massive land loss the island has experienced since 1955. The move is expected to be a model for other potential communities that may need to relocate in response to increasing coastal hazards.

Last year, the state won a $92.6 million grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development in the National Disaster Resilience Competition, which aimed to make a $1 billion investment in communities struck by federally declared, major disasters since 2011.

Louisiana was named one of 13 states and municipalities awarded part of the money, with $48.3 million being allocated to the resettlement project and the remainder going to resilience initiatives in six coastal parishes.

The money came with a time restraint, however. It must be tied to a project by September 2020, and construction must be finished by September 2022.

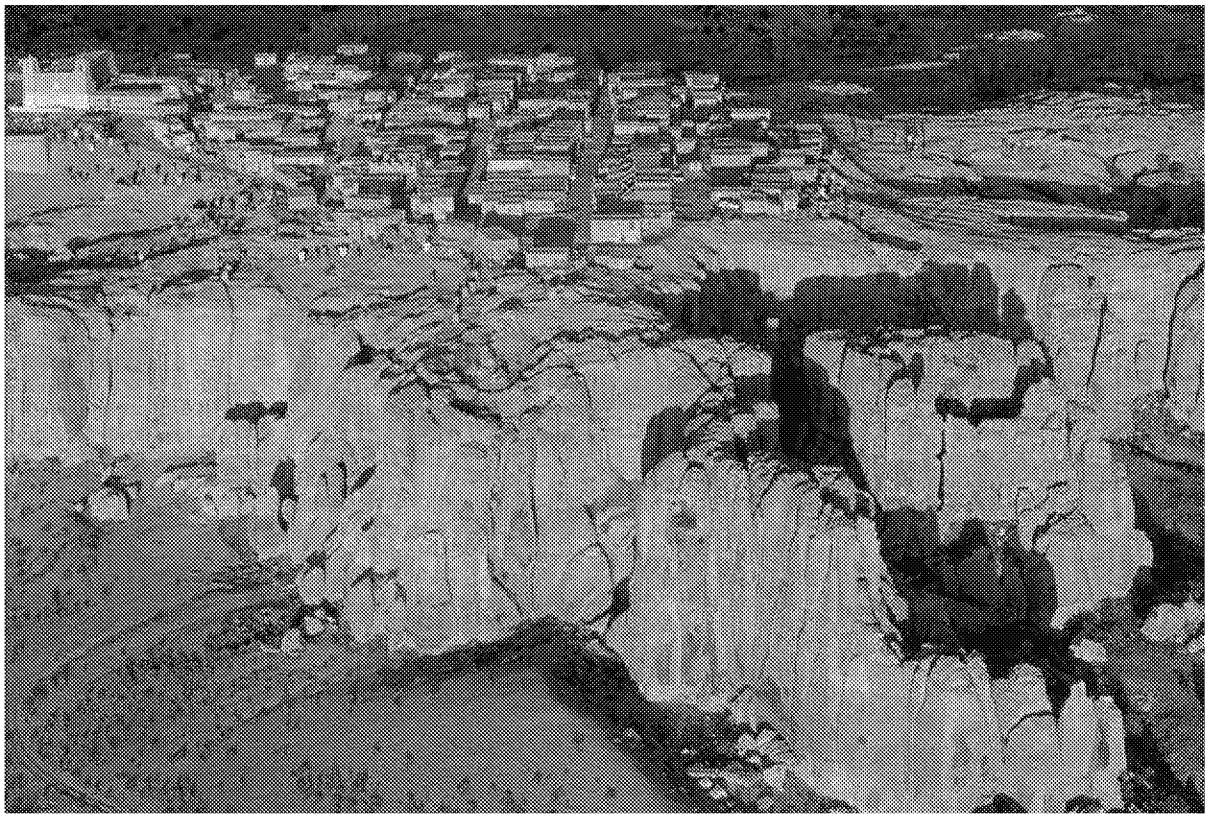
The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's Gulf of Mexico Program started the Gulf Guardian Awards in 2000 as a way to recognize and honor the businesses, community groups, individuals and agencies that are taking positive steps to keep the Gulf healthy, beautiful and productive, according to the EPA.

Delivery alert until NaN

Acoma Pueblo will get federal aid to repair flood damage

By Maggie Shepard / Journal Staff Writer

Published: Thursday, December 21st, 2017 at 11:34am
Updated: Thursday, December 21st, 2017 at 10:08pm



Acoma Pueblo. (Courtesy Kevin Flemming)

The Pueblo of Acoma has received a federal promise of aid to help residents recover from October floods that tore up roads and bridges.

Damage is estimated between $2 million and $6 million, Pueblo of Acoma Gov. Kurt Riley said Thursday.

He said the pueblo has faced damaging floods in the past and recovered by seeking emergency funding through the state.

But this time, the pueblo went straight to the Federal Emergency Management Agency, which announced Thursday that it would aid the community in rebuilding.

“The advantage of us doing it this way is all of the administrative and financial support would come to the pueblo itself. In the state declaration, some of those administrative supports go to the state,” Riley said. “We’re very grateful to the president for signing off on our declaration, and I hope this is a first interaction with pueblo tribes and nations in this country to try to address the needs of all of us.”

Exactly how much FEMA will contribute to the community is unclear, and Riley said the first step is a FEMA assessment of the damage caused by the Oct. 4-6 storms.

The flooding washed out roads and bridges connecting the community to its range and ranch area south of the pueblo, meaning people were cut off from their cattle and wood supplies as winter neared.

New Mexico's congressional delegation – Sens. Tom Udall and Martin Heinrich and Reps. Steve Pearce, Ben Ray Luján and Michelle Lujan Grisham – sent a letter to the White House in early December asking to expedite aid to the pueblo.

In a news release, the delegation said the storm "caused extreme damage to tribal infrastructure such as roads, bridges, and sewer lines. The piled-up debris and wreckage created treacherous driving conditions along 10 miles of roads and bridges, isolating parts of the Pueblo lands from the rest of the territory."

In 2010 and 2011, the pueblo received $3.7 million in federal money to repair flood damage, according to FEMA, but that money was run through the state's emergency system.

Contact the writer.

Pro Football

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Toxic Trouble: Hundreds of Superfund sites face flood risks

Jason Dearen, Michael Biesecker and Angeliki Kastanis, Associated Press

Published 2:05 am, Friday, December 22, 2017

TARPON SPRINGS, Fla. (AP) — When Anthony Stansbury moved down the street from the Anclote River in Florida last year, he didn't know his slice of paradise had a hidden problem.

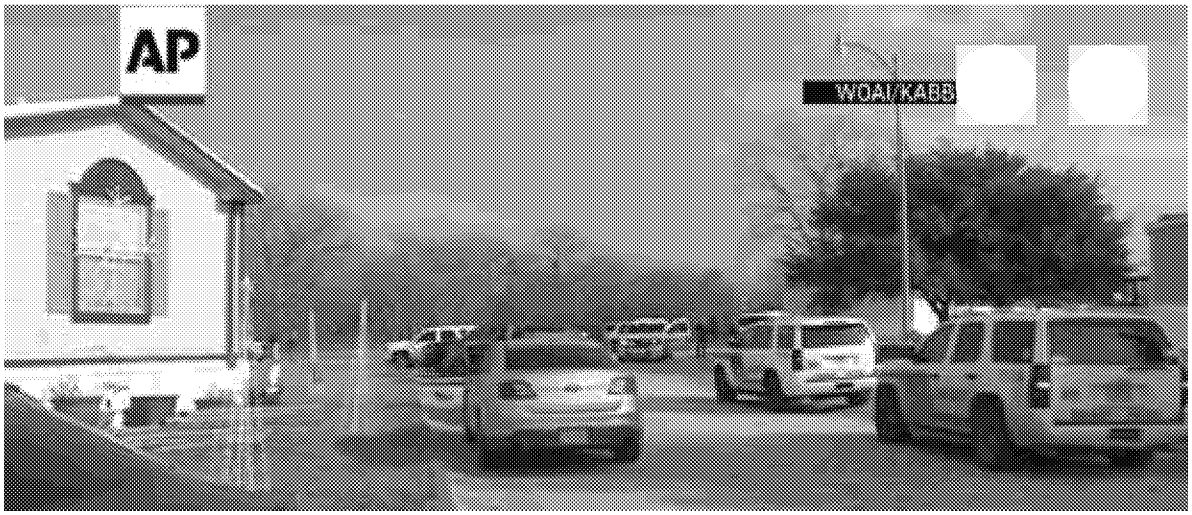
The neighborhood is adjacent to the Stauffer Chemical Co. Superfund site, a former chemical manufacturing plant on the list of the nation's most polluted places. It is also located in a flood zone.

"Me and my kids fish here a couple times a week. Everyone who lives on this coast right here, they fish on this water daily," said the 39-year-old father of three.

Stansbury is among nearly 2 million people in the U.S. who live within a mile of 327 Superfund sites in areas prone to flooding or vulnerable to rising seas caused by climate change, according to an Associated Press analysis of flood zone maps, census data and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency records.

This year's historic hurricane season exposed a little-known public health threat: Highly-polluted sites can be inundated, potentially spreading toxic contamination.

Local Channel



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In Houston, more than a dozen Superfund sites were flooded by Hurricane Harvey, with breaches reported at two. In the Southeast and Puerto Rico, Superfund sites were battered by driving rains and winds from Irma and Maria.

The vulnerable sites highlighted by AP's review are scattered across the nation, but Florida, New Jersey and California have the most, and the most people living near them. They are in largely low-income, heavily minority neighborhoods, the data show.

Many of the 327 sites have had at least some work done to help mitigate the public health threat, including fencing them off and covering them in plastic sheeting to help keep out rainwater.

The Obama administration assessed some of these at-risk places and planned to guard them from harsher weather and rising seas. EPA's 2014 Climate Adaptation Plan said prolonged flooding at low-lying Superfund sites could cause extensive erosion, carrying away contaminants as waters recede.

President Donald Trump, however, has called climate change a hoax, and his administration has worked to remove references from federal reports and websites linking carbon emissions to the warming planet.

"The current administration appears to be trying to erase these efforts in their climate change denials, which is a shame," Phyllis Anderson, an attorney who worked as EPA's associate director of the division that manages Superfund cleanups until her retirement in 2013.

EPA Administrator Scott Pruitt has said he intends to focus on Superfund cleanup, and appointed a task force that developed a list of high-priority sites.

The task force's 34-page report makes no mention of a flood risk to Superfund sites from stronger storms or rising seas, but eight of the 21 sites on EPA's priority list are in areas of flood risk. The Stauffer site in Florida is not on it.

Despite EPA's announced emphasis on expediting cleanups, the Trump administration's proposed 2018 spending plan seeks to slash Superfund program funding by nearly one third. Congress has not yet approved it.

Pruitt's office declined to comment this week on the key findings of AP's analysis. "Despite fear-mongering from the Associated Press, not a single dollar has actually been eliminated, as Congress still hasn't passed a budget," said Jahan Wilcox, an EPA spokesman.

Many flood-prone Superfund sites identified through AP's analysis are in low-lying, densely populated urban areas.

The Martin Aaron Inc. Superfund site is in Camden, New Jersey's Waterfront South, a low-income neighborhood along the Delaware River. Testing found that soil and groundwater under the site contained highly toxic chemicals, including PCBs and pesticides. EPA plans to eventually cover the land and restrict future use.

Just around the corner, longtime neighborhood resident Mark Skinner shrugged when asked about the former industrial site.

"It's really contaminated, there's a lot of stuff in the ground, but I don't know what all it is," said Skinner, 53.

Foul-smelling water filled the streets there during Superstorm Sandy in 2012, flooding basements, long-time residents said. Census data show about 17,250 people live within a mile of the Martin Aaron site — 65 percent are black and 36 percent are Latino.

Across the nation, more than 800,000 homes are located near flood-prone toxic sites. Houses are at risk of contamination from flooding, but many more people could be affected if the contamination seeps into the ground, finding its way into drinking water.

At the Stauffer site in Florida testing showed the lot's soils were contaminated with radium, the banned pesticide DDT, arsenic, lead and other pollutants that over the years have fouled the area's groundwater and the river.

Environmental regulators say the site, which was hit by Hurricane Irma, now poses no threat to people or the environment because the current owner, the pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca, paid to treat contaminated soils, and cover the pollution with a "cap" of clean earth. Still, residential development and use of groundwater on the site are prohibited.

Covering toxic waste is a cheaper option than removing the pollutants, said Jeff Cunningham, a civil engineering professor at the University of South Florida.

"As a long-term strategy, capping only works if the contaminants degrade to safe levels before the capping system eventually fails. What if it takes centuries for some of these contaminants to degrade to safe levels?" Cunningham said.

—

Associated Press environmental writer Michael Biesecker reported from Camden, New Jersey.

—

Follow Jason Dearen at http://twitter.com/JHDearen and Biesecker at http://twitter.com/mbieseck

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Trump halts funding for offsho drilling safety study

BY **TIMOTHY CAMA** · 12/21/17 05:20 PM EST

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The Trump administration has paused its funding for a major study meant to improve how regulators enforce offshore oil and natural gas drilling safety.

The congressionally chartered National Academies of Sciences, Engineering and Medicine said Thursday that the Interior Department's Bureau of Safety and Environmental Enforcement (BSEE) sent a stop-work order for the study earlier this month.

The National Academies had already gathered a committee of researchers for the study and conducted a meeting on the matter in October.

"The National Academies are grateful to the committee members for their service and disappointed that their important study has been stopped," it said in a statement.

BSEE told the National Academies that it would decide within 90 days whether to resume funding.

BSEE requested the study in 2016 as part of an ongoing effort to implement lessons learned from the 2010 Deepwater Horizon disaster and oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico.

BSEE spokesman Gregory Julian said the pause will allow the agency to evaluate whether the National Academies study is duplicating efforts already underway to improve its inspections.

but 'they don't want to talk to him'
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"As BSEE moves forward with implementing a risk-based inspection program to strengthen and improve its existing inspection program, the [National Academies] study was paused by BSEE to allow time to ensure that there are no duplicate efforts," he said.

This is the second time President Trump's Interior Department has halted a National Academies study. In August, the Office of Surface Mining stopped funding for a study into the potential health effects of people living near mountaintop removal mining operations.

The National Academies said Thursday that it had still not heard from Interior on whether it will resume funding for the mining study.

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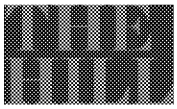

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Homeland Security suspends bioterrorism tests after public and tribal opposition

by Justin Wingerter • Published: December 21, 2017 4:32 PM CDT • *Updated: December 21, 2017 5:47 PM CDT*

A vehicle leaves the abandoned Chilocco Indian School campus in Newkirk in November. (AP Photo/Sue Ogrocki)

The Department of Homeland Security said Thursday it will suspend nonhazardous bioterrorism tests slated to start in February along the Oklahoma-Kansas border following a public outcry and opposition from area tribes.

"During the public comment period, DHS received many comments objecting to the proposed tests at the Chilocco Indian Agricultural School," said John Verrico, a Homeland Security spokesman.

"Based on the comments received from tribes, states and local governments, as well as the concerns expressed from residents in the proposed test area, DHS is suspending plans to perform the proposed tests," he added. "While the work remains very important for the security of our nation, further evaluation will be conducted to identify the best location for future testing."

Tests at the abandoned school were scheduled to occur in February and again over the summer. Homeland Security's plans were unveiled in a November report that, when first reported by the Newkirk Herald, shocked and scared many in the area.

Homeland Security renovated two residential buildings on the Chilocco campus to mimic modern homes, adding heating and cooling systems, repairing roofs and fixing windows and doors. Government scientists were to release particles outside the two buildings and track the extent to which they enter residences.

The powders released were to contain titanium dioxide, a common ingredient in toothpaste, paints, foods and medicine; urea, a fertilizer and the main chemical found in human urine; and a bacteria, bacillus thuringiensis, a naturally occurring biological material often used in organic gardening.

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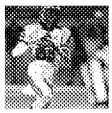

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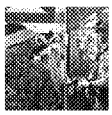

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In interviews with *The Oklahoman* last month, scientists from Homeland Security and Oklahoma State University — which oversees the lab chosen to conduct the tests — repeatedly stated the testing was nonhazardous.

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"The materials we're working with are generally regarded as safe," said Lloyd Hough, a general biological scientist at Homeland Security. "They're nontoxic, they're nonhazardous. I would not have any issues working with them and, in fact, if you walk around your home, you find a lot of materials that have much more dire and extreme hazard warnings."

Chilocco is managed by five Native American tribes, known collectively as the Council of Confederated Chilocco Tribes, which previously signed off on the Homeland Security tests but later stated their opposition.

"We stand united in opposition to the use of Chilocco for testing of potentially dangerous substances," said John Shotton, a spokesman for the tribal council, in a statement to The Associated Press last week. "Many of our tribal members went to school here. Indian children are buried here."

City officials in Newkirk urged residents to voice their concerns and congressmen on both sides of the border said they were tracking the issue.

"The safety of south-central Kansans has been my priority during this process, and I commend DHS for listening to our concerns," said Rep. Ron Estes, a Kansas Republican, in a statement Thursday.

An online petition was launched by an Arkansas City resident urging Homeland Security to stop the planned tests. It garnered more than 9,000 signatures. On Thursday, the petition was updated with a single word in the top right corner.

"Victory," it said.

Justin Wingerter

Justin Wingerter is the federal government reporter for The Oklahoman, covering the state's congressional delegation, Oklahomans in Washington and... read more ›

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Odessa Stinks! (Literally.)

In recent months the West Texas oil town has smelled, in one resident's words, like "a dog's anal gland." And no one is 100 percent sure why.

by **CHRISTOPHER HOOKS** | **JANUARY 2018** | **0 COMMENTS**

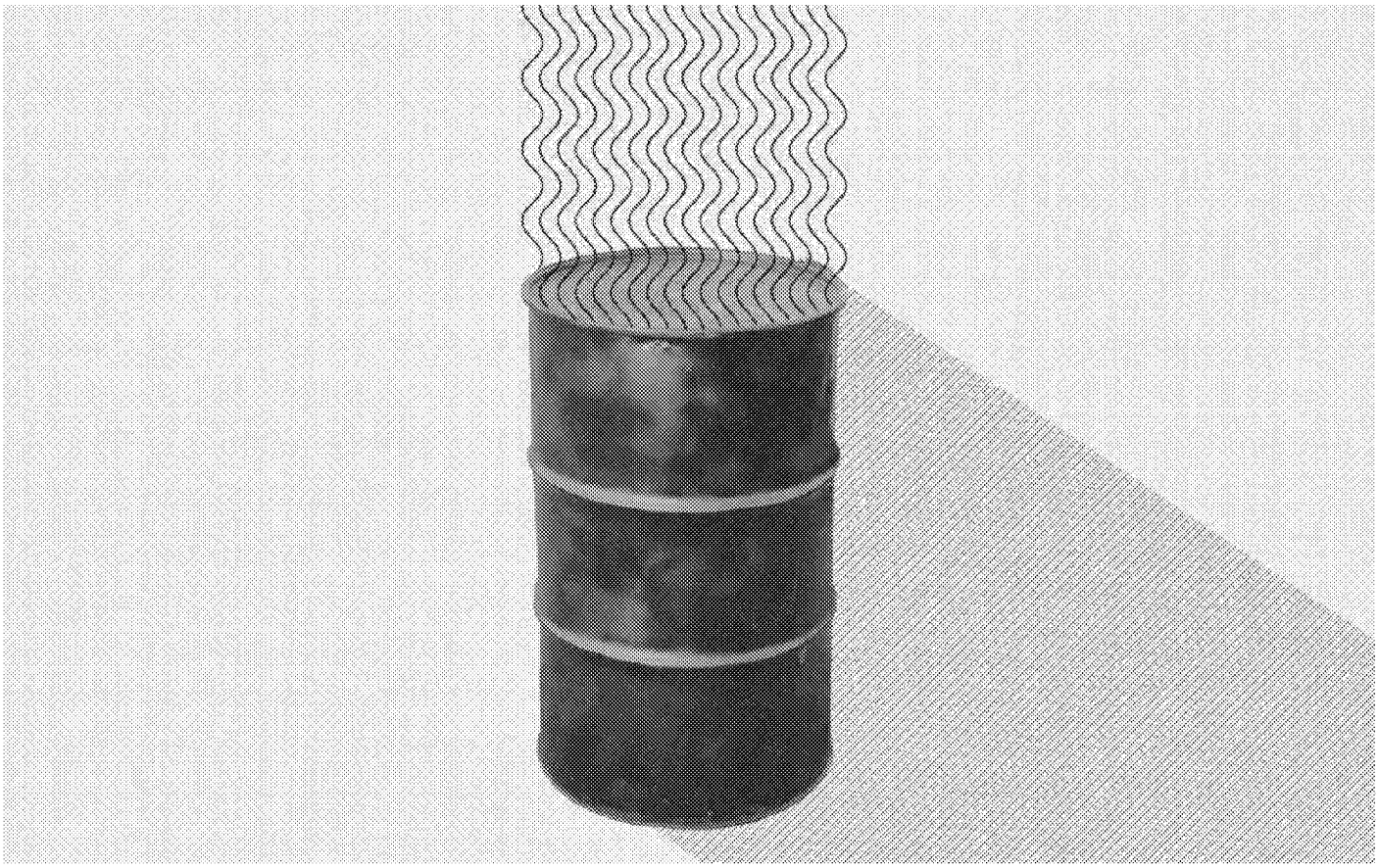

ILLUSTRATION BY ANNA DONLAN

This story originally appeared in the January 2018 issue with the headline "Can't You Smell That Smell?"

he oil field, it is said, smells, but it smells like money. Part of the price of living in a boomtown like Odessa is learning to tolerate the strange odors that accompany oil and

T gas production, like the rotten-egg smell of hydrogen sulfide. But the stench that descended on east Odessa over the past year is something else entirely.

Maria Chavez says she first noticed the powerful odor back in April, when she started driving for ride-sharing companies in town. A big part of her business was to take oil field workers to and from the gentlemen's clubs, Rick's Cabaret and Jaguars, on the east side of town. "To be honest, the first time I smelled it, I thought it was a passenger," she said. "But I kept encountering the smell, so I figured it was the area"—by which she meant an industrial zone near the strip clubs that's lined with a variety of chemical tanks and totes that supply local drilling operations.

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Over the course of Odessa's summer, the smell strengthened and spread. At first it was intermittent and dependent on the whims of the wind. But then it became a more frequent presence in some residential areas. Priscilla Hallmark, who lives north of the tanks, says she lodged the first of many complaints with state regulators at the Texas Commission on Environmental Quality around the Fourth of July. The smell, which she describes as "decaying fish," coated that holiday weekend. More recently, it made her Halloween and Thanksgiving festivities a lot less festive. It had become a fact of life.

In August, east Odessa residents started strategizing on Nextdoor, a neighborhood social network, and debating the proper descriptors. One opined that it smelled like "a dog's anal gland." Others considered the kind of decomposing marine life it most closely resembled: one said her church was abuzz with conversation about the "dead shrimp" odor, while another wrote that it "smells literally like a whale rotted and blew up in the neighborhood."

The feedback locals had been getting from the city and state, at that point, was disappointing. TCEQ investigators who made trips to the area in August theorized that rainwater pooling in retention ponds on one chemical company's site might have been the cause; the city's director of public works specified that decaying plant matter trapped beneath the pool's water might be causing the smell. According to one person on Nextdoor, the city also thought the smell could be sewage and replaced a lost manhole

cover in hopes of resolving the situation. But nothing changed. Hallmark told the local paper she considered contacting Erin Brockovich.

Months passed, and the smell continued to take a toll. Residents inundated the city, county, and TCEQ with complaints. Local resident Charles Duke, a ringleader of these efforts, escalated things by taking his complaints to the federal Environmental Protection Agency. In October he wrote to the EPA that the odor was "a variable intensity of grotesque" and had recently permeated a funeral he'd attended in the vicinity of the tanks.

Of course, Odessa is filled with people who have a thorough knowledge of the oil field, some of whom said as early as August that the smell reminded them of certain oil field products, such as corrosion inhibitors, that are sold by companies in the area. Odessan Eli Kidd, a longtime engineer for an oil field service company, noted that one corrosion inhibitor he frequently worked with, packer fluid, had "a very pungent, fishlike smell."

The wheels continued to turn slowly. A TCEQ report listed seven complaints between September 26 and October 12, which prompted another round of investigations. The regulators surveyed the wider area and made an assessment using the agency's "FIDO protocol," in which investigators measure the "frequency, intensity, duration and offensiveness" of bad odors, and eventually narrowed their focus to a business called Ace Completions, which stores a wide variety of oil field chemicals. It was a pool of water on Ace's dirt lot that had drawn the TCEQ's attention back in August.

That prompted a second visit, in which, finally, the regulators were hit with the full blast of the stench, as described in the succeeding report with clinical precision. "Investigator, Ms. Fairbanks, became nauseous from the smell," it reads. "Investigator, Mr. McIntosh, found the odor to be offensive at this point and did not wish to remain at this location longer than required," although he was not fast enough to prevent the smell from "saturat[ing] the TCEQ vehicle the investigators were driving, along with their clothing."

That sulfurous sojourn finally prompted the TCEQ to serve Ace with a Notice of Violation for creating a "nuisance odor." As to the question of the cause, the report notes that no specific source was found, but states that "TCEQ management and senior staff surmise that one or more of the chemicals" stored at the facility "were spilled and reacted with each other and or rainwater to produce the nuisance odor conditions."

Reached in late November on his way to his company's Christmas party, Ace's CEO, Jody Ehler, insisted that the problem had purely natural origins, noting that three tests that were run to detect contaminants, at the suggestion of the TCEQ, came up empty. The real explanation, he said, was far more prosaic: after a pair of intense summer rainstorms, Ace's entire property was flooded, and the storm water ended up in a retention pond, trapping plant matter, just as the city had initially suggested. (The water was reportedly pumped out and removed the first weekend of December.)

The real victim in the scenario, Ehler claimed, was Ace. The coverage in local media of the smell had been irresponsible and harmful to the company, and Ace was "working with the newspaper right now to redact [an] article" in which an area resident asserted that chemical contamination was involved. He also had critical words for regulators, who he said had mucked things up. The company, he said, had been working since early this year to redo the retention pond and might have solved the problem earlier had locals "not stirred up a lot of noise" and gotten so many agencies involved.

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And after all, he pointed out, "That's an industrial park that people live next to." Sometimes, when you live in an industry town, you have to grin and bear the sweet smell of success.

Tags: ENERGY, BAD ODORS, ACE COMPLETIONS, TCEQ

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REAL ESTATE 3 HRS AGO

High-end green home community planned for Frisco would cover roofs with native plants

Steve Brown, Real Estate Editor

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Developers like to brag about their "green" construction projects.

But a development proposed in Frisco takes the concept to a whole different level.

An international builder is working on plans for a 55-acre modern home community where the houses would have roofs covered in native plants. The new neighborhood on Independence Parkway near Rolater Road would also include heavily landscaped public areas and a bridge across a wooded creek.

"The proposed development offers a unique housing product that is the first of its kind in the city of Frisco and the region,"

Developer Total Environment has a track record of building distinctive, eco-friendly real estate projects at home in India and in other markets.

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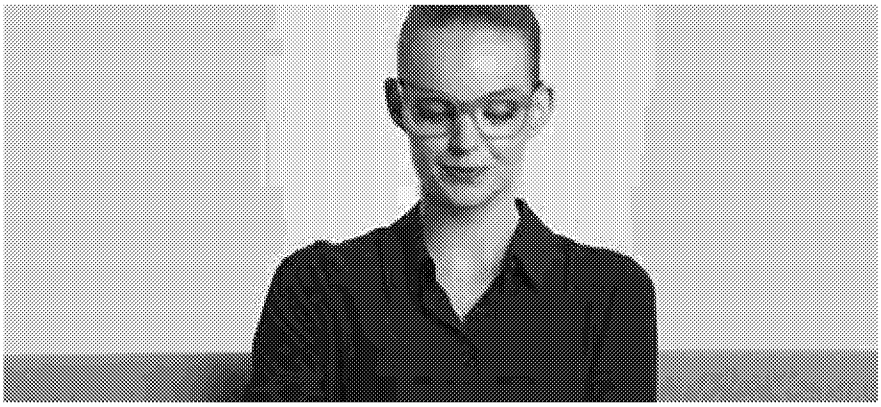

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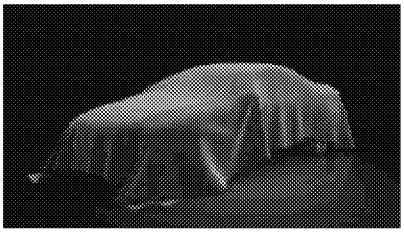
"The developer has been building these homes overseas for years, and they have been very successful," said Jim Knight, a senior principal with design and engineering firm Stantec. "A number of people already want to buy them."

Total Environment heavily landscapes its developments in India. Renderings for the Frisco proposal are shown. (Total Environment)

Stantec has been working with Total Environment for months to plan the residential development, which was recently approved by Frisco's planning and zoning commission.

The houses would be built with small front and rear yards and curved roofs that extend near ground level.

"We are working with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center, and they have come up with a planting, maintenance and monitoring plan for this entire project," Knight told the Frisco planning commission. "We know that the seasonal plants will rotate through as we go from spring to summer to winter to fall.



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By Southwest Kia

"We believe we have a very unique, sustainable, pedestrian-friendly community."

$900,000 and up

The development will have about 122 houses ranging in size from more than 4,000 to 5,000 square feet. "Your are looking at prices of $900,000 and up," Knight said.

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Almost 20 percent of the land would be open space, with areas set aside for walking trails and a water feature and plaza area.

"The property is absolutely gorgeous," Knight said. "Rowlett Creek runs through it, and there are three ponds.

"Only 23 of the 55 acres will be built upon, and we are lower density than the neighborhoods that adjoin us," he said. "We want to provide a sustainable environmentally friendly development Frisco can be proud of."

New residential project in Mesquite will have 1,000 homes

Knight said that while individual buildings in the U.S. have used roofs planted with greenery, the Frisco project is different.

"Nobody has done a community of them," he said. "There has been a lot of meticulous care taken to make sure what we are proposing works.

"If everything goes well, we'll start construction probably third quarter of next year."

Demand is up

American homebuyers are increasingly interested in projects that include sustainable development features and environment-friendly designs, housing industry polling shows.

"If they are coming into Frisco, I want to be the first one to buy into the project," Frisco resident Seema Kodancha told Frisco planning commissioners. "They are eco-friendly, very open space, very green.

"I have seen their properties back in India," she said. "They are a very reputed builder in India."

Total Environment has won awards at home for its heavily landscaped projects and innovative designs. The company has been in business for more than 20 years and builds a wide variety of housing.