



THE EAGLE LAKE HEADLIGHT

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The New Year Will Bring Important Developments

New Year's is not just a time for ringing out the old year and ringing in the new. It is a time to reflect on how far we have come over the past twelve months, and where we are going.

This past year saw some obvious highlights, not the least of which was the sight of a young Afghan woman casting the opening ballot in that nation's first democratic elections.

Some thought it would never happen, yet Afghanistan is heading in a new direction toward peace and prosperity after years of violence and oppression.

In 2005, we are on track to see the same momentous occurrence in Iraq. This storied land, home to the world's most ancient civilization, will see its first free and fair elections as her people establish a democracy.

Will there be setbacks and problems? Possibly. But what we do know is this: for decades, this was a nation that knew only tyranny and dictatorship, without hope and without freedom.

For the Iraqi people, this New Year offers unprecedented and enormous promise. The ouster of a Saddam Hussein regime known to support terrorism is due to the brave men and women in our armed forces who are fighting alongside stalwart Iraqis to defend liberty.

We should stand shoulder to shoulder with the friends of democracy in Iraq in the upcoming year.

I think our efforts will bear significant dividends in the years ahead and deal a blow to terrorists worldwide.

I also believe 2005 will bring welcome developments in our own country. If there is one government program which looks to the future, it is schooling, because public education has laid

CAPITAL COMMENT



U.S. SENATOR KAY BAILEY HUTCHINSON

the foundation of democracy in America.

Implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act will continue to provide incentives, funding, and accountability to our public school system.

I have also supported grants to many Texas institutions to help our state recruit and retain highly skilled educators to prepare our children to excel tomorrow.

We are already seeing gains in education for our children, and these should continue through 2005. Texas' colleges and universities will continue making strides as well. I have worked to increase our share of federal research, and hope to see our ranking among the states in R&D funding improve in the coming year.

That will translate into more discoveries and advances as well as stronger economic growth in our state.

One of most important legislative initiatives we shall see in 2005 will be a plan to improve and strengthen the Social Security program and preserve it for future generations. As the Baby Boomer generation retires, the system will be placed under tremendous strain

and will eventually become insolvent unless we take steps soon.

President Bush has shown courage and vision in addressing this issue now. Delaying action would only make changes that are inevitable more painful to implement.

Any legislation I support will be based on two bedrock principles. First, the United States will fulfill its promises to present beneficiaries and those who will be retiring soon.

Reform will also allow recipients to voluntarily invest a portion of their Social Security payroll tax payments into personal accounts which will provide a better return on investment and offer beneficiaries ownership over their retirement security.

This subject requires serious study and discussion before Congress takes action, but I am hopeful we will make progress in 2005 to strengthen Social Security.

America is a land of optimism and opportunity. We remain mindful of our past, but look forward to the future.

With this positive attitude, I am confident that together we will make 2005 a year to remember.

Insurance bill repeats hold on homeowner policies

The Legislature this session will be trying to put more bite into Senate Bill 14, the measure passed last session giving the Texas Department of Insurance power of prior approval of homeowner insurance rates.

Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst said at a press conference last week that 28 of 29 insurance companies doing business in Texas had reduced rates since passage of Sen. Mike Jackson's (R-La Porte) SB 14. The one holdout, the lieutenant governor said, had been State Farm Insurance.

"I am calling again on State Farm to stop playing Scrooge and give back your ill-gotten gains to policyholders in the form of an immediate 12 percent rate reduction," Dewhurst said.

State Farm responded that a state district court had found a portion of SB 14 unconstitutional and that the company's rates have been unchanged for nearly two years.

The new measure, filed Dec. 21 also as SB 14, would amend the Insurance Code to add stiffer penalties for companies charging rates determined to be excessive or using delay tactics to forestall reducing rates. The measure also would require refunds of excessive rates to be paid with interest amounting to the prime rate plus 6 percent.

If Santa brought a new shotgun or



State Capitol Highlights

By Mike Cox
 Texas Press Association

rifle...

Much of South Texas may have been blanketed with a once-in-a-century Christmas Eve snowfall, but for hunters, many species are either briefly back or still in season.

On the day after Christmas, the little-known and little-remembered winter dove season began in the central and south zones. It continues only until Monday in the central zone, but hangs on until Jan. 16 in the south zone.

Quail season continues in all counties until Feb. 27, and opportunities still exist for certain varieties of duck, geese and white tail deer.

To assess the possibilities, check the Texas Parks and Wildlife Department Web site at www.tpwd.state.tx.

Texas Historical Commission plans WWII project...

Some 320,000 living Texans served in the U.S. military during World War II, but scores of them are dying every day.

In an effort to capture some of their stories before they are gone, the Texas

Historical Commission has launched an \$800,000 effort to collect oral histories of WWII veterans, conduct a survey of Texas WWII military sites and place a series of WWII-related historical markers, and otherwise commemorate the approaching 60th anniversary of the end of the war.

For more information, check the agency's Web site at www.thc.state.tx-us.

Something for the kids...

The Texas General Land Office is looking for entries from schoolchildren for the annual "Treasures of the Texas Coast" children's art contest.

Open to kids from kindergarten to the sixth grade, the contest seeks an original piece of art (nothing computer-generated allowed) showing why the Texas coast is special. Deadline for contest entries is Feb. 7.

Parental release forms, information on how to enter the contest and the range of prizes can be found on the GLO's Adopt-A-Beach Program Web site, www.texasadoptabeach.org.

Screening Private Water Wells

The Colorado County Office of the Texas Cooperative Extension is sponsoring a water well screening for county residents on January 10, at the County Extension Office, located at 316 Spring St. in Columbus.

Results from the tests will be available at the County Extension Office on January 11 from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m. with a two hour CEU Program following it.

The cost of the screening is \$5 per sample and you should contact the County Extension Office by calling 979-732-2082 to receive an approved water sampling bag and instructions for taking your well water sample.

It is very important that only sampling bags from the Colorado County Extension Office be used and all instructions for proper sampling be followed to insure accurate results.

This well screening day is designed to inform private water well owners and users of possible contamination of well water from two common contaminants. These contaminants are fecal coliform and nitrate.

The presence of fecal coliform in water indicates that feces (bodily waste from humans or animals) may have contaminated the water.

Water contaminated with feces have microorganisms present that can cause a number "waterborne" diseases such as cholera, typhoid, and dysentery.

Nitrates in ground water at levels of 10 milligrams per liter (mg/L or parts per million) are considered unsafe for human consumption.

Nitrate levels above 10 mg/L can

disrupt the blood's ability to carry oxygen throughout the body.

Nitrate is converted to nitrite, which combines with hemoglobin, the chemical that carries oxygen in the blood to form methemoglobin.

Oxygen cannot bind with methemoglobin, therefore, oxygen is not carried throughout the body.

As a result, oxygen starvation occurs.

This conditions is call methemoglobinemia. If left untreated, death may result. Infants less than six months of age and young livestock are most susceptible.

For your convenience the following businesses will have water sampling kits and instructions available beginning January 3: M-G Farm Service Center - Weimar, Bernardo Farm & Ranch, Heinsohn's Store - Frelsburg, Eagle Lake General Store, Garwood Farmers Co-Op.

Samples should be collected the morning of the January 10 and brought into the County the Extension Office or one of the above listed locations by 9 a.m.



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