

TEXAS ■ PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN

Democratic Party is sued over primary

Groups say delegate process discriminates against Latinos

By Michelle Roberts
ASSOCIATED PRESS

SAN ANTONIO — The Texas Democratic Party was sued Friday by Latino advocacy groups that say the primary and caucus system used in the state's March 4 presidential contest unfairly diluted Latino votes.

The League of United Latin American Citizens of Texas and the Mexican-American Bar Association of Houston sued in federal court, arguing that the party failed to seek clearance required by the U.S. Justice Department for the process, the so-called Texas Two Step. The groups also say the system effectively discriminates against Latino voters by giving them fewer delegates.

Texas Democrats distribute the state's 193 delegates using both a primary and a caucus, but the distribution favors state Senate districts that had high voter turnout in the most recent presidential and gubernatorial elections. That meant that on March 4, predominantly Hispanic districts, in which turnout was low in 2004 and 2006, got fewer delegates than others, particularly urban, predominantly black districts. Latino districts generally favored Democratic presidential candidate Hillary Clinton; black districts favored her rival, Barack Obama.

"The manner used to allocate the delegates ... undervalues Latino Democratic voters and

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See the lawsuit with this story online.

AUSTIN

Doctors gather, share research at meeting of minds

Forum stresses collaboration as way to improve health care

By Mary Ann Roser
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Dr. T.J. Milling of Austin treats a lot of people for snakebites, and he has to estimate how much of an expensive, powerful antidote to give them. He is now working on research with a local company that wants to develop a more precise blood test that would eliminate the guesswork — and reduce his worries about allergic reactions.

A different worry lured Dr. Todd Maxson, a father of three, to another line of research. Many times a year, Maxson has to tell parents that he could not save their child in the emergency room. It always leaves him anguished, he said, prompting his work with University of Texas researchers about how doctors can better communicate bad news.

Milling and Maxson are among doctors with the Seton Family of Hospitals who spoke Friday at the first Central Texas Clinical Research Forum for doctors, scientists and health care providers aimed at encouraging collaborations

See **SHARE**, B4

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TEXAS

Audit criticizes dam safety

Report says inspections are too infrequent; experts say more money needed to boost staffing

By Asher Price
AMERICAN-STATESMAN STAFF

Texas' failure to inspect dams in a timely manner could jeopardize life and property, according to a state auditor's report released this week. The state does not ensure the safe construction, repair and maintenance of its dams, the report says.

The Texas Commission on Environmental Quality's dam safety program is understaffed compared with programs in other states, says the report, which was published Wednesday.

With about 120 high-hazard dams per inspector, Texas ranks last nationally, according to the Association of State Dam Safety Officials.

High-hazard dams are ones whose failure would be expected to lead to deaths and excessive economic loss.

Since 1970, there have been 13 high-hazard dam failures in Texas.

Environmental commission spokesman Terry L. Clawson said that despite the report, "we know of no dams in the state of Texas that are

in imminent danger of failure."

Dam safety experts say the program needs an infusion of cash to better ensure safety. To inspect its 7,603 dams, Texas has seven staff inspectors and contracts with two outside entities.

In an overall budget of almost \$600,000, the dam safety program received \$350,000 from the state and \$240,601 from the federal government in 2007.

"Without adequate money, they can't do much with staffing," said Sarah Mayfield, a spokeswoman for the Kentucky-based Asso-

See **AUDIT**, B3

Sinkhole a Texas sight to behold



James Nielson HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Tours of a sinkhole that has opened in Daisetta, northeast of Houston, are being offered to residents concerned about their safety. After swallowing oil field equipment and some vehicles, the sinkhole appears to have stabilized.



What: A sinkhole opened suddenly Wednesday morning near the Deloach Vacuum Disposal Co. in Daisetta, about 60 miles northeast of Houston. Estimates vary, but the hole is reported to have grown to as much as 900 feet in diameter and 260 feet deep. It gobbled up trucks, grain tanks, utility poles and pine trees but appeared to have stabilized by late in the week. A Deloach maintenance shed was on the edge of the hole and could fall in. The main road through town, FM 770, homes and the high school have been spared so far. Guided tours were offered to residents Friday to 'give them a little peace of mind,' said Mayor Lynn Wells, who is also the fire chief.

Why: Daisetta (named for two early residents, Daisy Barrett and Etta White) sits atop a large salt dome formation, part of which collapsed,

'The earth just wallered up.'

LYNN WELLS

Daisetta mayor and fire chief

said Carl Norman, a geologist. The sinkhole, Norman said, could have developed naturally or been hastened by injections of oil companies' saltwater wastes into the dome.

Previous sinkholes: In 1973, a sinkhole known as 'the December Giant,' which was 520 feet by 125 feet across and 60 feet deep, opened near Montevallo, Ala., At the time, it was called the largest collapse in the country in many years. In the 1980s, smaller sinkholes opened in and around Daisetta.

What's next: Authorities continue to monitor the sinkhole, but little can be done to stop it. Norman said sinkholes are unpredictable, sometimes growing in spurts that stop and start, and probably should be observed for three months before a site is declared safe. Authorities are prepared to evacuate the town's more than 1,000 residents. Liberty County officials voted Friday to seek disaster relief from the state.

Sources: The New York Times, Houston Chronicle, Associated Press



Pat Sullivan ASSOCIATED PRESS

The sinkhole might have grown to be as much as 260 feet deep. See more photos at statesman.com/multimedia.

CELEBRATIONS



Bride will wear white, but she hopes Bush wedding won't give her the blues

By Erin Quinn
WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD

WEST — Nora Bartosh has been waiting for her wedding, scheduled for today, for the past six years. Now, the 34-year-old West drugstore clerk is worried that a president's daughter could steal her groom and thus her special day.

The groom, all eight groomsmen and about 150 of the guests work in McLennan County law enforcement. That leaves Bartosh hoping that everything goes smoothly in and around President Bush's Crawford-area ranch today as first daughter Jenna says her vows. If it doesn't, most of Bartosh's wedding party in

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Find photos, quizzes and more stories related to Jenna Bush's wedding online.

the town about 18 miles north of Waco could be called out on business.

The groom has been "relaxed and calm about it," she said. "I'm the one freaking out. I am worried. I'm a lot worried."

And there's reason to do so.

"Whenever the Secret Service request our assistance, we are there," said Chief Deputy

See **WEDDING**, B4



Rod Aydelotte WACO TRIBUNE-HERALD

Nora Bartosh, 34, has planned today's wedding for six years. But the groom, groomsmen and half her guests work in law enforcement in the Waco area and could be called upon to assist with first daughter Jenna Bush's wedding near Crawford.