



## NEWSBRIEFS

### Best practices award

The Texas Association of School Business Officials (TASBO) announced that Canutillo ISD is one of 53 educational organizations in the Texas to be recognized for following best practices in the area of purchasing operations. TASBO's Purchasing Award of Merit was created to recognize Texas school districts, open-enrollment charter schools, and education services centers that are committed to following professional standards in the acquisition of goods and services. "We had one of the higher engagement scores in the state for the Award of Merit," Martha Piekarski, Chief Business Officer said. "Our District staff has worked together to achieve financial transparency and high-quality financial reporting. When the District thrives, students, families, and the community benefit." The District will be honored at an awards reception on Tuesday, February 16, 2021 in Austin during the TASBO annual conference.

— Liza Rodriguez

### Texas road safety

The side of a highway may be a chaotic environment, but it's also the daily office space for law enforcement, first responders, utility workers, tow truck drivers and TxDOT workers. That's why TxDOT is calling on Texas drivers to keep these roadside workers safe. TxDOT's "Be Safe. Drive Smart." safety initiative is urging motorists to follow the state's Move Over/Slow Down law. This law requires drivers to move over or slow down when approaching law enforcement, tow trucks, utility vehicles, emergency responders and TxDOT vehicles stopped with activated overhead lights on the side of the road. Drivers who fail to give emergency and work crews space to safely do their jobs face fines up to \$2000. Unfortunately, police officers, tow truck drivers and other roadside workers are hit, injured or killed on the side of the road every year. TxDOT is calling on all drivers to respect these workers who are vital to keeping our roads clear and safe. This year's effort to remind motorists to move over and slow down coincides with National Traffic Incident Response Awareness Week and TxDOT's annual "Click It or Ticket" seat belt awareness campaign

— Jeff Salzgeber

*Give authority to some people and they grow; give it to others and they only swell.*

— Quips & Quotes



## HOW A BIG DREAM FOR THE US AND MEXICO COULD HELP BOTH COUNTRIES

— Image courtesy of Rick LoBello

**CROSSING BORDERS** – The Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition recently hosted a virtual public meeting via Zoom. The group discussion focused on how to promote a big dream – the Big Bend trans-boundary park and reserve between Texas and Mexico, which is depicted in the promotional image above.

## Dream of Big Bend trans-boundary park still alive

By **Alfredo Vasquez**  
*Special to the Courier*

TEXAS – On October 24, 1944, U.S. President Franklin D. Roosevelt wrote, "I do not believe that this undertaking in the Big Bend (referring to the establishment of Big Bend National Park) will be complete until the entire park area in this region on both sides of the Rio Grande forms one great international park."

President Roosevelt penned those words in a letter to His Excellency General

Manual Avila Camacho, President of the United Mexican States. This undertaking that Roosevelt suggested, this concept, this dream, has been floating around both sides of the Texas-Mexico borderland ever since.

The international park idea really resonated with Rick LoBello, El Paso Zoo education curator and Chihuahuan Desert Education Coalition (CDEC) member, when he was invited by the then Governor of Coahuila Mexico in 1988 to visit the Mexican side of the proposed park region on an expedition with National Park and

Texas Parks and Wildlife officials.

LoBello related that consequently, in 1997, he was instrumental in enlisting the support of the Rotary International organization, and that a year later hundreds of Rotarians from the U.S. and Mexico gathered at Chamizal National Memorial in El Paso for an international meeting, where they dedicated their efforts to see that the international park project would come to fruition. "Unfortunately, Rotary was not successful in keeping the project

See **PARK**, Page 6

## Moody, Zwiener, file cannabis reformation bills

By **Ellic Sahualla**  
*Special to the Courier*

TEXAS – Joe Moody (D-El Paso), Speaker Pro Tempore of the Texas House of Representatives, and State Representative Erin Zwiener (D-Driftwood) have collaborated on a two-pronged approach to cannabis law in Texas.

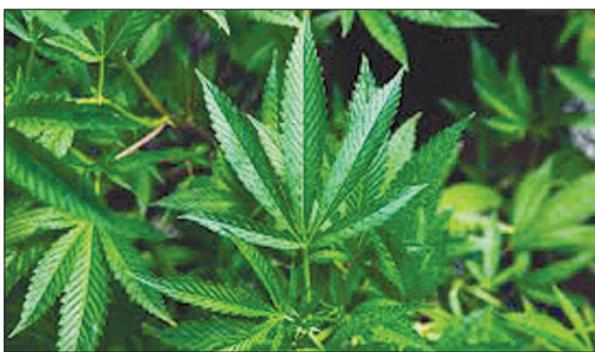
House Bill 447, filed by Speaker Moody, would legalize cannabis and create a retail market for cannabis products, including marijuana. It would remain illegal to make cannabis available to people under 21 years of age. Revenue collected from sales would be placed in a

dedicated fund that supports both teacher retirements and teacher salaries in Texas public schools.

House Bill 441, filed by Representative Zwiener, is the decriminalization effort

championed by Moody in past sessions. The bill uses existing legal procedures in novel ways so that possession of a personal use amount of marijuana could only result in a ticket and a small fine, without an arrest or lasting criminal consequences. The measure was passed by a supermajority of the House in 2019 but failed to advance in the Senate.

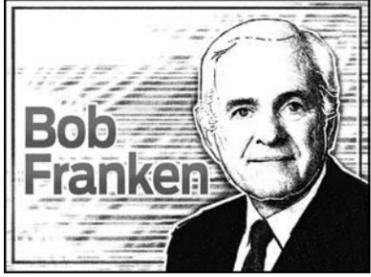
"One thing that's become crystal clear in the years since I began working on cannabis policy is that there's no moral or public safety issue involved here," said Moody. "There is very much a fiscal issue, though, and numerous other states



— Internet image

**TEXAS TWO STEP** – Texas State Representatives Joe Moody (D-El Paso) and Erin Zwiener (D-Driftwood) have both filed bills to change cannabis laws in Texas.

See **CANNABIS**, Page 7



# ‘The Way We Were’

It was 1973 when the hit movie “The Way We Were” was released, starring Barbra Streisand and Robert Redford as an unlikely couple with divergent political beliefs and backgrounds. It came with a haunting title song, sung by Streisand.

While most of us wouldn’t want to “light the corners of my mind” with recent memories – unless you’re into nightmares – if it were to be remade about the current political climate, it would be called “MAGA,” another way of saying “the way we were.” Redford would definitely not be playing any

of the main characters, and Donald Trump has been written out of the script. This time, the important couple trying to recall their relationship of so many years ago would be Joe Biden and Mitch McConnell.

That would make some risky assumptions. It would suppose that Trump had exhausted all of his various subterfuges and had been dragged kicking and screaming out of the executive mansion. It would also hypothesize that McConnell would maintain his position as the opposition’s majority leader of the Senate – a likely prospect, because any other scenario would assume the Democrats had been successful in both Georgia runoff elections to choose the state’s U.S. senators. Given the Democrats’ track record, that

would be far-fetched.

The likelihood is that President Biden and Sen. McConnell will resume playing “Let’s Make a Deal,” a throwback to the good old days of the Swamp, when they were both Swamp Creatures.

“Can it be that it was all so simple then? Or has time rewritten every line?”

True, time has rewritten every line. Now so many lines appear as Twitter or Facebook misinformation – actually, let’s call them what they are: lies. But still, it is worth a try to achieve what’s necessary to rescue America, by some good old-fashioned give-and-take. “Compromise” isn’t necessarily a profane word. McConnell and Biden helped write the book on negotiation.

Mitch and Joe know how

the backroom game is played. Back in late 2012, when Biden was vice president in Obama’s administration and McConnell was still the Republican leader in the Senate, the United States was about to welch on its debts. The two warring parties were locked in intransigence over raising the borrowing limit. The U.S. faced the calamity of not being able to pay its financial obligations and defaulting for the first time in history.

At the last minute, McConnell reached across party lines and made a phone call to Biden. Both had honed their skills with decades of Senate experience together. So when McConnell dialed from his Capitol office to Biden in the White House, all he had to say was, “Does anyone down there know how to cut a deal?” They certainly did, and a few hours later, the nation had been rescued at the last minute

from mortification.

Will these two 78-year-olds gloss over the extreme antagonisms that have paralyzed our country? Or is it too late? Will Trump’s sludge, as he plots a comeback and still manages to confuse his misled 70 million supporters, gum up the works, making governing impossible? Is the United States of America trapped in that abyss, inevitably falling into just historical memory?

Marilyn Bergman, Allen Bergman and Marvin Hamlisch’s title song “The Way We Were” puts it:

“If we had the chance to do it all again, tell me, would we, could we?”

Can we?

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## TxDOT’s ‘Click It or Ticket’ runs through Nov. 29

By Jeff Salzgeber  
Special to the Courier

TEXAS – With health and safety a top priority for millions of Texans, TxDOT reminds motorists of one of the simplest and easiest precautions everyone can take to protect themselves and their loved ones: buckling up.

Wearing a seat belt reduces the risk of dying by 45% for people in the front seat of passenger cars. For those in pickups, seat belts reduce the risk of dying by 60% since pickups are more likely to roll over than passenger vehicles.

“Our annual *Click It or Ticket* campaign is about saving lives,” said TxDOT Executive Director James Bass. “While almost 91% of Texans have gotten into the habit of using seat belts, there are still

far too many motorists who are taking unnecessary chances by not buckling up. Whether you’re the driver or a passenger, wearing a seat belt – day and night – is the single most effective way to protect yourself from serious injury or death in a crash.”

TxDOT officials report that in 2019 there were 925 traffic fatalities involving an unbuckled driver or passenger, a 6% drop over the previous year. Although around 9% of Texans do not wear a seat belt, the lack of seat belt usage was reported in 42% of traffic fatalities for those people who had the option to use a seat belt (excluding pedestrian, bicycle and motorcycle fatalities).

In addition, a 2019 Texas A&M Transportation Institute survey noted that drivers and passengers in 18 Texas cities buckle up less at night (between 10 p.m.

and 5 a.m.) than during the day. In Texas last year, of crashes in which an unbuckled driver or passenger was killed, 59% happened during nighttime hours (6 p.m. to 5:59 a.m.). Seat belt use among pickup drivers and passengers also continues to lag behind that of other motorists. Almost 46% of the 499 pickup drivers killed in crashes last year weren’t buckled up.

From November 16 to November 29, as we approach and celebrate Thanksgiving and more drivers take to the road, state troopers, police officers and sheriffs’ deputies statewide will step up enforcement of the state’s seat belt and child car seat laws. Texas law requires everyone in a vehicle to be properly secured in the front or back seat or face fines and fees up to \$200. Children younger than 8 years must be restrained in a child safety seat or booster seat unless they are taller than 4

feet 9 inches. If a child isn’t secured, the driver faces fines of up to \$250.

According to the National Highway Traffic Safety Administration, the *Click It or Ticket* initiative in Texas is estimated to have saved more than 6,234 lives, prevented more than 100,000 serious injuries, and resulted in \$23.6 billion in economic savings since the campaign began in 2002.

The *Click It or Ticket* campaign is a key component of #EndTheStreakTX, a broader social media and word-of-mouth effort that encourages drivers to make safer choices while behind the wheel such as wearing a seat belt, driving the speed limit, never texting and driving, and never driving under the influence of alcohol or other drugs. November 7, 2000 was the last deathless day on Texas roadways. #EndTheStreakTX asks all Texans to commit to driving safely to help end the streak of daily deaths on Texas roadways.

1973  
**47**  
Years  
2020

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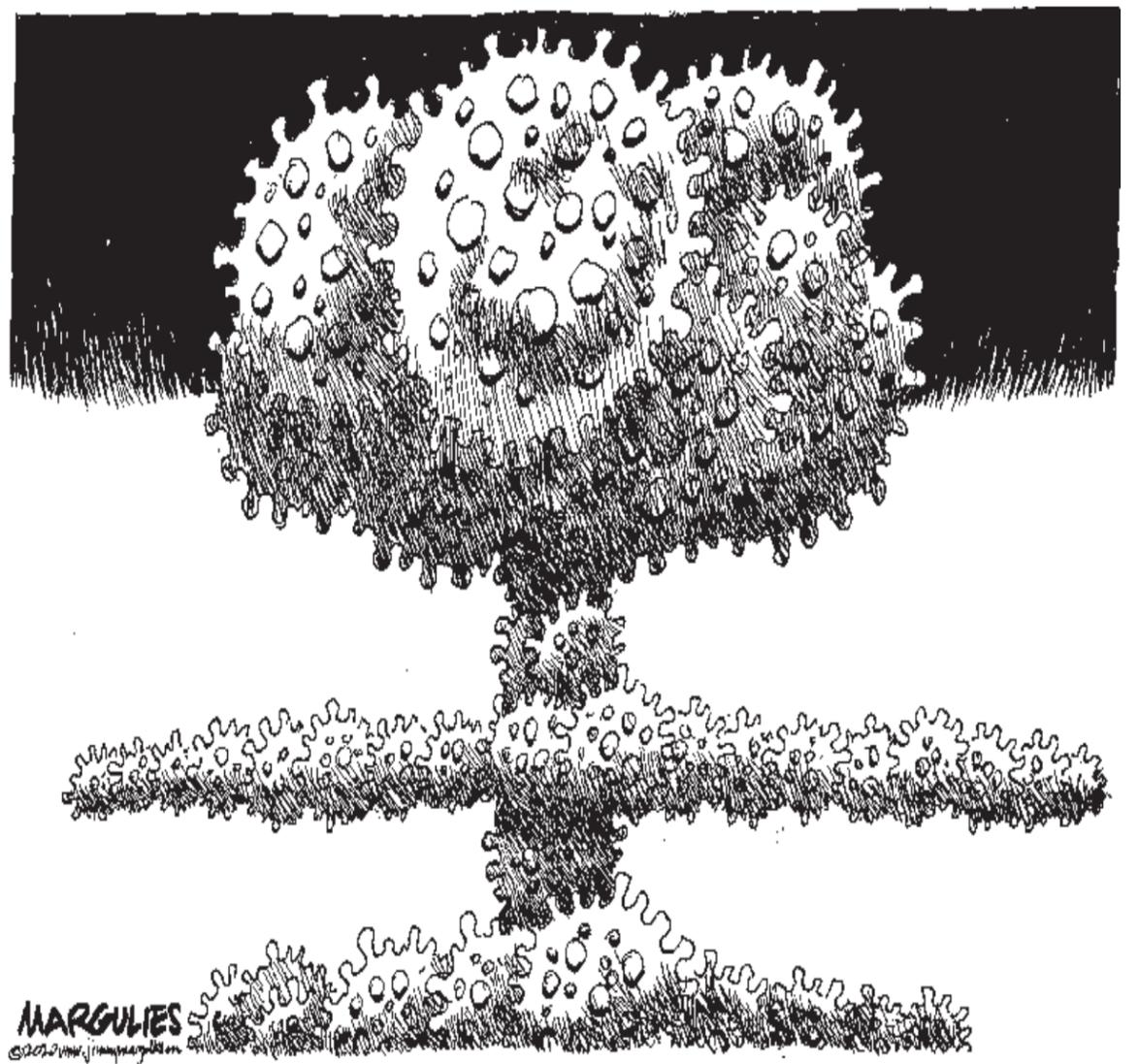
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# The 'Blue Trickle'

Ordinarily, it's not possible for a party to win the presidency and have a bad election night, but the Democrats managed it.

Pending the outcome of two Senate runoff in Georgia, Joe Biden looks set to become a caretaker president who won't be signing any legislation that doesn't pass muster in Mitch McConnell's Senate first.

He isn't riding into the White House on the strength of a Blue Wave, as was so often predicted, but a Blue Trickle that saw Democrats fail to win control of the Senate (they need to win both Georgia seats in January to get to a 50-50 tie), suffer shocking setbacks in the House, and lose ground in state legislative races after investing heavily in them.

Biden clearly owes his victory (which President Donald Trump, of course, is still contesting) in large part to Trump's personal unpopularity. In races where the president wasn't on the ballot, in contrast, the weakness of the Democratic Party stood exposed and it paid the price.

If the former vice president succeeded in making the presidential race a referendum on Trump, Republicans succeeded in making House races, in effect, a referendum on Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez

and the woke socialism that animates Democratic activists and draws so much attention. (Nancy Pelosi posed for a cover of Rolling Stone with members of the Squad, and Ocasio-Cortez is on the cover of the latest issue of Vanity Fair.)

Bolstered by the media, Democrats were so certain they were riding the tide of history to inevitable pickups in the House that they didn't pause to take note of the unpopularity of their agenda and the left of their party.

Republicans took the socialist label and hung it around the neck of Democrats. It was especially devastating in South Florida, where voters from Cuba, Venezuela and Colombia came to the United States to flee socialism. Republicans knocked out incumbent Democratic Reps. Donna Shalala and Debbie Mucarsel-Powell in heavily Hispanic districts.

In New York, Republicans used the most idiotic slogan of our times, "defund the police," and the state's law curtailing cash bail to pummel Democrats on law and order, and likely defeat two House incumbents. The GOP wielded the Democrats' anti-fossil fuel agenda in the Southwest and Biden's tax

increase in California to defend their seats and make pickups across the map.

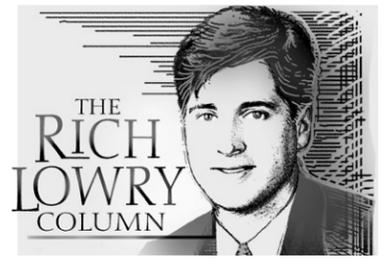
When all is said and done, Nancy Pelosi's House majority may be the smallest in 20 years, and it will certainly be highly vulnerable in 2022.

It is usually the losing side that is beset by a bitter civil war after an election. Make no mistake, there is plenty of that to come in the Republican Party. But despite winning the White House, the Democrats will be riven by recriminations and fights over

the path ahead.

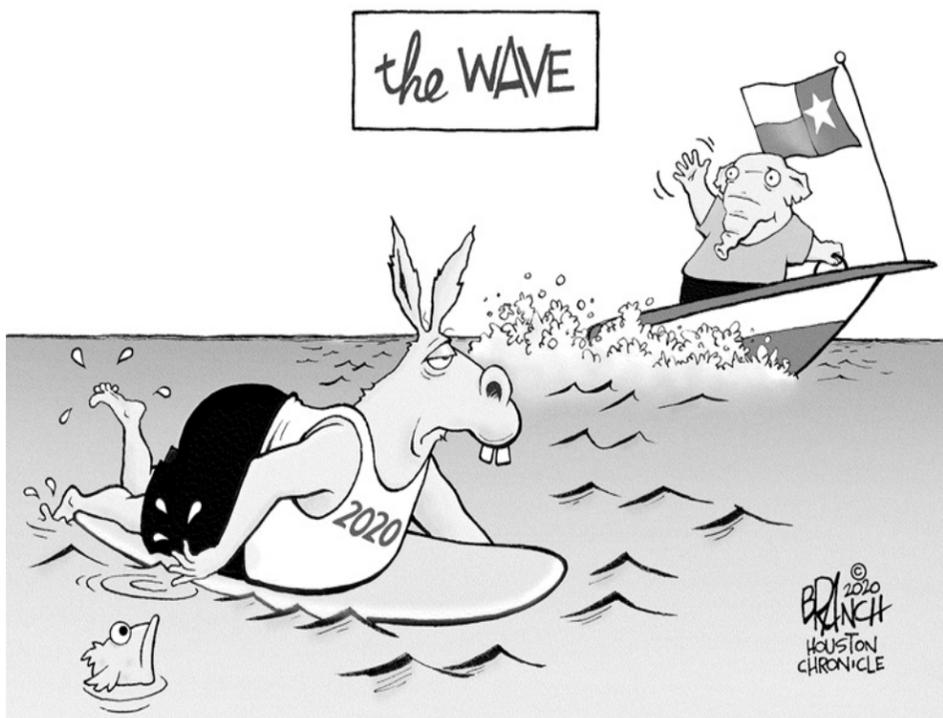
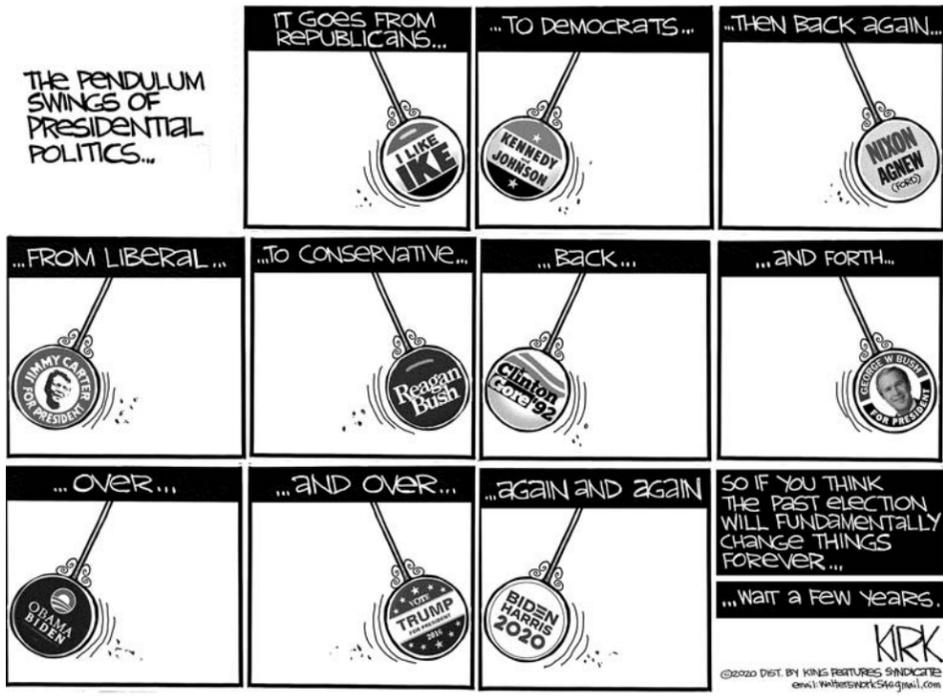
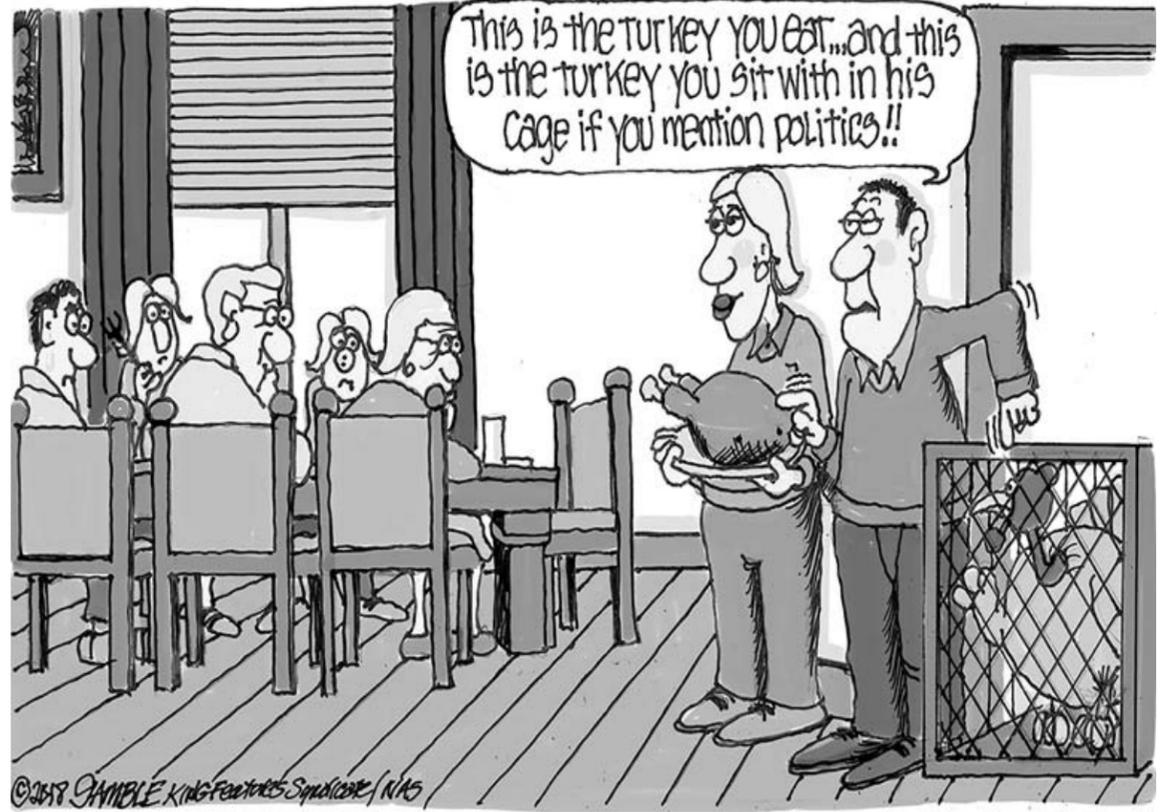
It is always a danger for a political party to believe its own PR. That's a risk especially hard for Democrats to avoid when practically every instrument of the culture celebrates left-wing causes and works to create the sense that their triumph is inexorable.

This year, Democrats thought they were marching from strength to strength, when they were really on thin ice with an electorate that was prepared to reject Trump, but not to empower a party that has



elevated socialists and outlandish ideas from defunding the police to the Green New Deal.

Rich Lowry is editor of the National Review. (c) 2020 by King Features Synd., Inc.





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# College football beginning to resemble NBA and MLB

By Steve Escajeda  
Special to the Courier

Like everything else in this once-in-a-century year of 2020, college football has been doing its best to accomplish its goal.

And what is the ultimate goal? It's not to determine a national champion; it's not to fill out the postseason bowl schedule; it's not to figure out how to get more fans in the stands – the ultimate bowl for all college football teams is just to get to next week.

Every single week, several games are cancelled or postponed because one or both teams are suffering from positive virus results.

Really, a couple of UTEP opponents decided to cancel their visits to the Sun

Bowl because of all the negative Covid news they heard about El Paso.

Don't get me wrong, conferences all around the country are doing what they can to re-schedule games, but the available dates and times and sites don't always cooperate.

To be honest, three months ago I would have bet money that there would be no college football season. The way things were, I thought they would just blow off this season and start again in 2021.

But the NCAA decided to give it a shot. A couple of conferences (SEC and PAC-12) decided not to play, but changed their minds after they saw all the other teams playing.

And here's the biggest problem of all. Because some conferences starting play before others and because schedules have been switched around so much – the

upcoming process of selecting teams for any playoff system or any bowl games can't possibly be fair.

Coming into this weekend, there are some teams that had played eight games so far, and there are some that had only played one. And there are actually some who hadn't played a single game yet.

So at the end of the season, there will be some teams who have played all 12 games, some will have played seven games and some may only have played two or three.

Based on that, how do you choose which teams go to playoffs and which ones don't? The bowl games, like the Sun Bowl, will still choose their teams in a certain order, but how do you decide on a team if it hasn't played very many games?

Who is the best team in the country? Alabama, Ohio State, Clemson or Notre

Dame?

Let's see, Clemson has played eight games, Notre Dame 7, Alabama 6 and Ohio State 3.

There are other teams in the running like Wisconsin, which had just played one game going into last weekend. How about undefeated teams like BYU (7-0) and Cincinnati (7-0). Neither team is considered one of the big boys, but at least they've played plenty of games and won them all.

There will be traditionally elite teams with 3-1 or 4-2 records, do they deserve to advance to any playoffs, or even a bowl game against teams that played a whole season worth of games and are 9-2 or 10-1?

If the NCAA considers them a usual powerhouse, you know they will. But is it fair that those teams are chosen by their reputation and not their 2020 achievements?

There is absolutely no doubt that this year has probably been the most difficult one the world has seen since the days of World War II, and when you really put things in proper perspective, football really isn't that important.

But because 2020 will have asterisks all over it, we might as well put an asterisk on NCAA football and let a BYU or a Cincinnati (if they remain undefeated) participate in college's final four championship playoff.

There have been so many stops and starts to the season, I sometimes think the best thing would have been to just scrap it all until 2021 – so that it could be done right.

To start something and keep adjusting it as it goes never works out well.

So the mess will continue all the way into the postseason. There will be meaningless games played in empty stadiums between teams that are worthy and teams that are not.

It was an admirable try, but like the NBA and MLB, college football's 2020 season can be described with one word – "forgettable."

## Park

From Page 1

on the international radar screen, and we are where we are today," he stated.

Also, LoBello stated that at a meeting in Juarez in 1999, he was encouraged by Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt and later in a letter, via National Park Service Inter-Mountain Regional Director John Cook, to continue advocacy efforts and to develop the political and diplomatic consensus that is required to establish the trans-boundary protected area.

Subsequently, LoBello has been a strong advocate for the Big Bend international park proposal ever since and has participated and organized various events throughout the years to help keep the dream alive.

LoBello's most recent endeavor was hosting a public virtual meeting- via a Zoom link. He hosted the event to highlight the need for harmony and cooperation among mutual diverse communities during these challenging times.

The online presentation was designed to elicit public input

about what could happen next and how the park proposal process could impact major problems both countries are facing including climate change, the border wall, conservation of rare and endangered species, immigration, the economy, as well as US-Mexico relations.

The virtual gathering was sponsored by the Chihuahuan Desert coalition, which has been advocating for conservation education in the northern Chihuahuan Desert region since 2004.

"Today, most people who support the Big Bend park proposal talk about a trans-boundary protected area since Mexico does not have national parks like we have in the United States," stated LoBello. However, "the proposal is still just a thought with no serious plans by either government to complete Roosevelt's dream for both countries," he added.

But for LoBello, the dream is still very much alive and invites others to join his and other CDEC members' efforts in addressing the international park matter among other local and regional conservation issues.

For more information, contact LoBello by sending text message to (915) 474-1456.

## San Eli HS

From Page 4

demonstration of students learning in a virtual environment and achieving success. There are truly no obstacles when a student finds their focus in a

career of their choosing." Domingo Sanchez added, "These 'Soaring Eagles' are the paradigm of true leadership, unwavering commitment, and grit. Some of these students worked several hours extra using the Google Translator to accomplish this incredible task. Tackling OSHA 30 could potentially be

the most difficult high school assignment they undertake. Kudos to the students."

Seven students from SEHS have completed this course so far. They are Ivan Berumen, Gael Andres Luna, Alexis Maldonado, Victoria Portillo, Aaron Jeremiah Vallecillo, Kevin Arroyo, and Roberto Salinas.

## Super Crossword

- C 5 ACROSS**
- 1 Patronize for purchases
- 7 Tennis segment won without loss of a point
- 15 Dude
- 20 Actress Duff or Swank
- 21 Not righted, as wrongs
- 22 Epic about Troy
- 23 What a Siemens is a unit of
- 26 Open into flower
- 27 Seamless shift
- 28 Get fixated
- 29 Scottish port
- 30 Viper type
- 33 \_T (just so)
- 34 Broiling bar
- 35 Diverse assortments
- 44 Flip out
- 46 "\_ help if..."
- 47 \_Khan (Islamic title)
- 48 Elicit an encore, say
- 49 Italian entree
- 55 Ore- \_
- 56 Gift getter
- 57 Signs off on
- 58 "My treat"
- 59 Mars vehicle
- 61 "Dilate" artist DiFranco
- 62 Formerly
- 63 Oakland team
- 65 Flukes
- 70 Many a released prisoner
- 72 Grandpa Walton player Will
- 73 Tarzan player Ron
- 74 Draw out
- 75 Jai \_
- 76 Reagan's "Star Wars" prog.
- 77 Tries to trim down
- 82 Luau chow
- 83 Dartboard's rings, e.g.
- 88 Astral bear
- 90 Alternate spelling of a word: Abbr.
- 91 Fair-hiring abbr.
- 92 Actor Kevin of "Weeds"
- 93 Part of a routine baby immunization
- 99 Churn up
- 100 Stetson, say
- 101 Ending of ordinals
- 102 Flow stopper
- 105 Err in finding the total of
- 108 Fruity pastries
- 110 Jaffa citizen
- 114 Assembly associated with a church creed
- 118 Put off
- 119 Cheapest ship quarters, formerly
- 120 Take out of the pier
- 121 Number of dwarfs
- 122 Infuriated
- 123 Gazes
- DOWN**
- 1 The Bible's Queen of \_
- 2 Far from flat, as terrain
- 3 Balsam fir or pine extract
- 4 Lobby orgs.
- 5 Part of MFA
- 6 Beginner
- 7 Jean- \_ Godard
- 8 \_whim
- 9 Actors Kilmer and Avery
- 10 "And on and on": Abbr.
- 11 Bit of babble from a crib
- 12 Once-a-year
- 13 Old Persian
- 14 Academy email ending
- 15 Activity-tracking device
- 16 Stretchy
- 17 See 65-Down
- 18 Mille \_ (Minnesota county)
- 19 Fruity beverages
- 24 Apple buy
- 25 Police cruiser
- 31 Post-it note, informally
- 32 Gyro breads
- 34 Utah's lily
- 36 Winans with 12 Grammys
- 37 Be fond of
- 38 French for "summer"
- 39 Govt. health agency
- 40 Tardy
- 41 Pitted garnishes
- 42 The Green Party's Ralph
- 43 Trades jabs
- 44 Watch readout, for short
- 45 "So that's your trick!"
- 50 For the \_ (temporarily)
- 51 Self-pride
- 52 Run up, as expenses
- 53 The "A" of OAS: Abbr.
- 54 Bana of "Troy"
- 60 Poem of exaltation
- 61 Suffix with pent-
- 62 Whale locale
- 63 Keepsake
- 64 At least one
- 65 With 17-Down, Princess or Royal Caribbean
- 66 Ad \_ committee
- 67 Baldwin of "Aloha"
- 68 Eye suggestively
- 69 British soldier of old
- 70 Add zing to
- 71 Beautify
- 75 Prefix for "height"
- 76 Food filter
- 77 Three, in Ulm
- 78 Optimistic
- 79 Interior-design magazine
- 80 Saints linebacker Manti \_
- 81 Tax form ID
- 84 Egg-shaped things
- 85 Salt, chemically
- 86 Clergyman's area: Abbr.
- 87 Ltd. cousin
- 89 Civil War folk song
- 94 Trendy
- 95 Pursued
- 96 Hauled (off)
- 97 Clothes
- 98 Trendy
- 103 1970s-'80s sitcom
- 104 Gets as much as one can out of
- 105 Docs' orders
- 106 Big name in slushes
- 107 1970s-'80s skit show
- 108 "Toodles!"
- 109 Read digitally
- 111 \_chef (#2 in a kitchen)
- 112 Peewee pup
- 113 Cost an arm \_ leg
- 115 Belief system
- 116 Epoch
- 117 Guided

Answer Page 4

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# Comix

## OUT ON A LIMB By Gary Kopervas



## AMBER WAVES By Dave T. Phipps



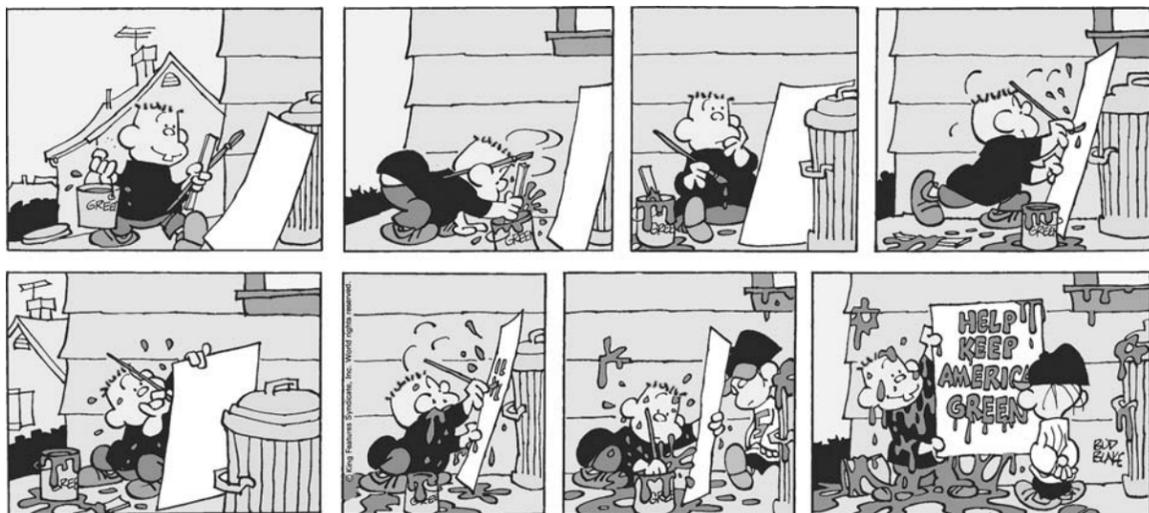
## THE SPATS By Jeff Pickering



## R.F.D. By Mike Marland



## TIGER By Bud Blake



## Cannabis

From Page 1

are now raking in tax revenue from cannabis sales that Texas needs more than ever. We can't say that Texas is the best state for business when we're literally turning it away."

Moody was enthusiastic about Zwiener's filing of the bill he once carried: "Representative Zwiener is one of the

smartest and hardest working people at the Capitol; I have absolute confidence in her taking the reins on decriminalization. She also brings a perspective and voice different than my own to this conversation. This is an effort favored by Texans of all different backgrounds, and it's important that they're reflected in those leading it in the legislature."

"Our current cannabis laws don't make sense," said Rep. Zwiener. "We're leaving dollars on the table, wasting public safety

funds on enforcement, and saddling Texans with unnecessary criminal records that harm their ability to find work and housing. It's time to bring our cannabis laws into the 21st century, and I'm eager to get to work on reducing penalties for possession of cannabis."

Other cannabis-related bills are expected this session as well, such as an expansion of the state's small medical marijuana program. Moody sees these as complementary rather than competing

efforts: "The different approaches here all have the same goal: ending a status quo we know has never worked, one that's cost taxpayers billions of dollars and stolen opportunities from countless Texans saddled with unjustified criminal records. Frankly, anything is an improvement over what we've been doing."

Each bill will be considered after the Texas Legislature convenes after January 12, 2021.

# The weight-loss battle continues

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am looking for advice on diet pills. I have tried everything. I eat well, go to the gym and walk, but my meniscus problem limits my walking speed. Since menopause, I have gained 30 pounds. I am sure there is something out there that will kick-start my metabolism. I am so depressed, and my doctor has no sympathy. — A.R.



Difficulty losing excess weight is one of the greatest public health problems in industrial countries, and I'm not going to solve it here, but I'll try to discuss principles of drug treatment for weight.

One critical issue is to look at any medications you are taking: Many can cause weight gain, and some, like beta blockers, often used for high blood pressure, are unrecognized by many doctors. Stopping medicines that predispose to weight gain is critical.

Depression itself is a predisposing factor to weight gain. Some people lose weight with depression, but my experience is that weight gain is much more common. Many anti-depression medicines cause weight gain. One, bupropion, commonly causes weight loss.

Among medicines specifically for weight loss, most work either by decreasing fat absorption or by reducing appetite. They don't really increase metabolism, with the exception of phentermine, which does increase resting energy expenditure somewhat and may be useful in preventing weight regain in people who have lost weight, for whom metabolism does often slow down.

Orlistat (called Xenical by prescription, Alli over-the-counter) prevents the body from absorbing some of the fat in the diet. The fat is then excreted through stool. This may cause many people to have gastrointestinal side effects, which are diminished when on a low-fat diet. Orlistat caused people to lose about 7 pounds more than placebo.

There are several drugs that work on appetite. Liraglutide is a diabetes medicine that has been found to be helpful in overweight people even without diabetes. Metformin is another diabetes medicine that is sometimes used for weight loss, although it does not have a Food and Drug Administration indication for this. Both of these diabetes drugs often have gastrointestinal side effects. Lorcaserin (Belviq) is about as effective as orlistat, but with fewer side effects (headache was the most common).

Some weight loss experts use combination drugs, including phentermine/topiramate (Qsymia) and bupropion/naltrexone (Contrave). These have more significant risks. I don't prescribe these drugs, but I do refer my patients who are interested in medication treatment to a weight loss expert. Look for a doctor who is board certified in obesity management.

It's important to remember that medications are not a cure for being overweight. Once the medicines stop, weight is expected to rise, unless a person makes significant changes in diet and exercise.

DEAR DR. ROACH: I am a female, 16 years old. My white blood cell count is 16.6. I am suffering from so much weakness and pain in my legs, arms and shoulder area. I also have a cough and cold. Is it dangerous? What should I do for it? — K.C.

I don't have enough information to help much. A white blood cell count that high suggests an infection. At your age, those symptoms are most likely a viral infection, but acute mononucleosis and even pneumonia are possible, so you need to see your doctor.

Dr. Roach regrets that he is unable to answer individual questions, but will incorporate them in the column whenever possible. Readers may email questions to [ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu](mailto:ToYourGoodHealth@med.cornell.edu). (c) 2020 North America Synd., Inc. All Rights Reserved.



**Moore Texas** by Roger Moore  
Texas' first Thanksgiving feast was likely hosted by Spaniard Juan Onate near present day El Paso in 1598.

## CryptoQuip

This is a simple substitution cipher in which each letter used stands for another. If you think that X equals O, it will equal O throughout the puzzle. Solution is accomplished by trial and error.

Clue: G equals L

KTHHFVKVMY UM VMKAJQ  
XUK KVMYVMY XVQE  
JGFKAC GVHK, PVYEQ VQ  
IA JUGGAC U ETPITY?

Answer Page 4

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## Weekly SUDOKU

by Linda Thistle

	1		4			9		
7		6				2		8
9				3				7
	8		1		6	3		
		2		7				5
1		7	8					6
	4			9				3
3					4	5		6
		8	7					2

Place a number in the empty boxes in such a way that each row across, each column down and each small 9-box square contains all of the numbers from one to nine.

**DIFFICULTY THIS WEEK:** ◆

◆ Moderate ◆◆ Challenging

Answer Page 4

◆◆◆ HOO BOY!

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# OIG is vets' watchdog



by Freddy Groves

You have to admire the Department of Veterans Affairs Office of Inspector General. If there's something illegal going on, they will find it.

In one case, the doctor said that, no, she had never prescribed anything without first speaking to the patient over the phone to ensure that the drug or equipment was required. The VA OIG didn't just take her word for it, though. It dug around and unearthed the truth: The doctor in Dallas had committed telemedicine fraud against federal insurers including Medicare, Tricare and CHAMPVA by repeatedly ordering products without ever talking to the patient. The result: She'll have to forfeit \$33,000 in fees she took for telemedicine visits she didn't do and pay a \$180,000 fine. Later, at sentencing, she could be sent to the slammer for five years.

In another case, the VAOIG investigated a urologist who had "severe hand tremors and possibly low visual acuity" to determine whether facility leaders had evaluated him and his continued clinical privileges with the VA. The OIG also discovered an additional concern: whether facility leaders had followed directives to report the surgeon to the appropriate state licensing boards.

The answer: No, facility leaders had not overseen the problem of hand tremors and low visual acuity; no, he hadn't been reported to licensing boards; and no, nobody had made recommendations about the surgeon's privileges. Meanwhile, there were veterans who had invasive urological procedures done by a doctor with shaky hands and bad vision.

Not all OIG cases are so serious, but they do merit attention.

In one case, managers of a patient account center used government money to buy refreshments for employees in connection with a VA Diversity and Inclusion Initiative event.

However, VA policy says they can only buy food for cultural events that raise awareness of ethnic history if the food is a sample of that culture and is meant to be educational.

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• Remember to turn off bathroom fans after 10 minutes. In the winter, if your house is on the dry side, don't use the fan at all: Open the door so the humidity from the shower or bath reaches into the house.

• "To remove the skin from salmon, I freeze it and skin it while frozen. The skin comes off much easier, and I waste less of the fish. I buy a large piece and parcel it into several smaller pieces, since it's just me. I like salmon, and it's healthy for me!" – L.A. in Florida

• Need extra dishware or servingware for a holiday meal? Try looking at secondhand stores for large dishes, serving utensils and more. It's sometimes cheaper than getting throwaways, and it's better for the environment! You can always donate them again after the holidays.

• Here's a makeup tip from Captain Obvious: Wet your beauty blender. I didn't know this and had been using it for about a month before my sister told me. So much better! – V.A. in Florida

• Freeze fruit that is on the verge of spoiling rather than letting it go to waste. You don't even have to use it for smoothies. Chuck a handful of frozen fruit in water or iced tea for added flavor. And it's a superb addition to fancy cocktails.

• "Quick sewing tip: Check your fabric's stretch direction before you lay out your pieces. You'll thank me later." – E.F. in Missouri

Send your tips to Now Here's a Tip, 628 Virginia Drive, Orlando, FL 32803. (c) 2020 King Features Synd., Inc.

## GO FIGURE!

by Linda Thistle

The idea of Go Figure is to arrive at the figures given at the bottom and right-hand columns of the diagram by following the arithmetic signs in the order they are given (that is, from left to right and top to bottom). Use only the numbers below the diagram to complete its blank squares and use each of the nine numbers only once.

	+		×		18
×		+		+	
	÷		+		11
+		×		×	
	×		+		21
22		20		14	

1 1 2 3 4 5 6 8 9

**DIFFICULTY:** ★★

★ Moderate ★★ Difficult

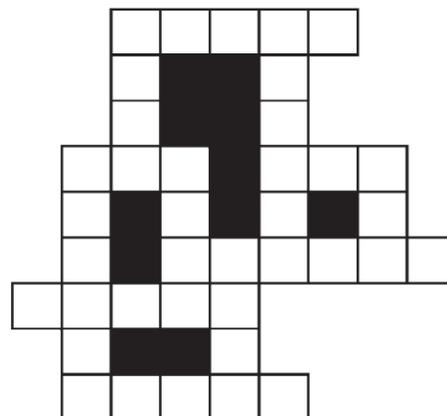
★★★ GO FIGURE!

Answer Page 4

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- ♥ UTG
- BRILEG
- ♥ SEBTA
- ♥ LTIA
- SAGOLT
- ♥ TBA
- ♥ TOBL
- ♥ RHUBS
- ♥ BGI
- BELGIO
- GAONT
- ABUE



Answer Page 4

Unscramble these twelve letter strings to form each into an ordinary word (ex. HAGNEC becomes CHANGE). Prepare to use only ONE word from any marked (♥) letter string as each unscrambles into more than one word (ex. ♥RATHE becomes HATER or EARTH or HEART). Fit each string's word either across or down to knot all twelve strings together.

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