

Agency: Alamo Needs \$1M in State Funds for Extensive Repairs

AUSTIN (AP) — The agency now overseeing the Alamo said Thursday that the historic site needs \$1 million for an “extensive list” of repairs that grew under its longtime caretakers, while a decision on the heated issue of whether to display the famous “Victory or Death” letter from the 1836 battle is set for next week.

Fearing one of the most sacred texts in Texas might be damaged if removed from “dark storage” for a 177th anniversary celebration in

February, members of the state’s historical commission are wary of the request from the state’s General Land Office. The commission is expected to rule Wednesday.

The letter was penned by Col. William Barret Travis, the commander of the Alamo garrison, as Mexican forces encroached in considerable numbers. Seldom has the letter been displayed in public, and never on the original grounds in San Antonio.

“The concerns the agency

have are the mitigation of risk,” said Peggy Rudd, director of the Texas State Library and Archives Commission. “This is a document that is almost 200 years old. It has not always been cared for in the most appropriate ways.”

The General Land Office took ownership of the Alamo last year at the behest of the Legislature, which had grown concerned about the care of the iconic Texas landmark. Worries arose following accusations of mismanagement and financial incompetence levied at the non-

profit Daughters of the Republic of Texas, the century-old caretakers of the shrine.

The Daughters remain the Alamo’s primary caretaker but now answer to stricter state oversight.

Larry Laine, the office’s deputy commissioner, told members of the Texas House’s Committee on Culture, Recreation and Tourism that his agency will ask for a one-time \$1 million appropriation when the Legislature reconvenes in January.

Fundraising for Alamo projects was among the biggest challenges

facing the Daughters in recent years and brought criticism about their ability to continue managing the symbol of Texas independence.

“There are many projects that couldn’t be properly tackled in the period of years leading up to our taking over of it,” Laine said. “A lot of stuff from temporary fixes, just to try to get by — we’re going to try to clean all that up.”

Even if lawmakers approved the funding next year, it wouldn’t come close to the amount of preservation work consultants have said

the Alamo needs. Some estimates exceed \$5 million.

Laine praised the Daughters for being “respectful” and helpful while being put under greater state scrutiny.

Significant changes are already under way at the Alamo since the land office took over. For the first time, a private company began operating the Alamo’s gift shop this month.

The store had previously been run by the Daughters and made about \$4.6 million in sales last year.

Judge Rules for Cheerleaders in Bible Verse Banner Suit

AUSTIN (AP) — A judge ruled Thursday that cheerleaders at an East Texas high school can display banners emblazoned with Bible verses at football games, saying the school district’s ban on the practice appears to violate the students’ free speech rights.

District Judge Steve Thomas granted an injunction requested by the Kountze High School cheerleaders allowing them to continue displaying religious-themed banners pending the outcome of a lawsuit, which is set to go to trial next June 24, Texas Attorney General Greg Abbott said. Thomas previously granted a temporary restraining order allowing the practice to continue.

School officials barred the

cheerleaders from displaying banners with religious messages such as, “If God is for us, who can be against us,” after the Freedom From Religion Foundation complained. The advocacy group says the messages violate the First Amendment clause barring the government — or a publicly funded school district, in this case — from establishing or endorsing a religion.

Gov. Rick Perry, who appointed Thomas, a fellow Republican, to the district court to fill a vacancy, issued a statement welcoming the ruling.

“Today’s ruling is a victory for all who cherish our inalienable right to freedom of speech and religious expression,” Perry said. “I am proud of the cheerleaders at Kountze ISD

for standing firm in the knowledge of these endowed rights and their willingness to be an example in defending those rights, which a secular group has needlessly tried to take away.”

Abbott, who filed court papers seeking to intervene in the lawsuit on behalf of the cheerleaders, also issued a statement commending the ruling.

“Students’ ability to express their religious views adds to the diversity of thought that has made this country so strong,” Abbott said.

Abbott argued that the Texas Education Code also states that schools must respect the rights of

students to express their religious beliefs.

“It is the individual speech of the cheerleaders and not in fact the government speaking,” David Stames, the cheerleaders’ attorney said, according to KDFM television. “It is not just one girl or one person in the group that comes up with the quote, but it’s on a rotating basis that each girl gets to pick the quote. That is their individual voices that are being portrayed on the banner.”

Thomas Brandt, the attorney representing the school district, said the superintendent had acted to comply within existing legal rulings.

The Anti-Defamation League

issued a statement in which it called the judge’s decision misguided.

“Public schools are for children of all faiths or no faith, and these banners were clearly being displayed in the context of school-sponsored activities,” the group said. “Faith is a profoundly personal decision, so students should not be subjected to an exclusionary school-sponsored religious message on campus or be forced to choose between attending quintessential school events — football games — or being subjected to an unwanted religious message.”

The Freedom From Religion Foundation, which is dedicated to

the separation of church and state, said it is ready to provide legal assistance to anyone living in the school district who wants to join the lawsuit to ban religious banners at school events.

“Since the state’s top law enforcer, Attorney General Greg Abbott, and its highest executive officer, Gov. Rick Perry, have openly expressed contempt for atheists and the Establishment Clause, this leads to a climate of intolerance,” Dan Barker, the group’s co-president, said. “It takes courage to face down the full apparatus of state government.”

Fire Destroys State Fair of Texas Icon Big Tex

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DALLAS (AP) — Fire destroyed Big Tex on Friday, leaving behind little more than the metal frame of the 52-foot-tall metal-and-fabric cowboy that is an icon of the State Fair of Texas.

Some fabric that made up the towering structure’s hand and sleeves could still be seen as firefighters gathered around the scorched area.

Big Tex’s 75-gallon hat, 50-pound belt buckle and slow drawl — “Howdy, folks!” — have been greeting fair visitors since 1952. This year’s fair, which closes Sunday,

had been celebrating Big Tex’s 60th birthday.

“It’s a great loss for us because of its icon stature,” fair spokeswoman Sue Gooding said.

Gooding said she didn’t know the cause of the fire but did note electrical controls move Big Tex’s mouth and head. A Dallas fire spokesman didn’t immediately respond to an email message seeking comment.

Gooding noted that no one was injured in the fire and added that she expects him to be back for next year’s state fair.

“He’ll be back, bigger and better than ever,” she said.



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U.S. Postal Service Hits \$15 Billion Borrowing Limit

WASHINGTON — The U.S. Postal Service has hit its \$15 billion borrowing limit with the U.S. Treasury, adding to the financial pressures on the struggling mail carrier.

“It’s a serious concern,” USPS spokesman Dave Partenheimer said Wednesday. Currently, however, the agency — which has been buoyed by a recent flood of election-year mailings — is managing its cash to ensure that workers and suppliers are paid, he said.

Although the agency had to make a \$1.4 billion payment for workers’ compensation Monday, no particular factor contributed to its decision to max out the \$15 billion line of credit late last month, Partenheimer said.

“It was a cash management decision made based on our liquidity issues,” he said. That decision, which USPS officials had previously not disclosed, was first reported by *The Wall Street Journal* on Tuesday.

The Postal Service “is now walking a tight rope with no net,” Art Sackler, co-coordinator of the Coalition for a 21st Century Postal Service, a organization of mailing industry suppliers, said in a statement. “The longer Congress waits to enact postal reform, the more difficult and more expensive the solutions become.”

Partenheimer reiterated a call for Congress to approve legislation to restore the Postal Service to long-term financial stability. A bill passed by the Senate in April would let the Postal Service tap an estimated \$11.4 billion surplus with the Federal Employees Retirement System for employee buyouts and other purposes. The House has not acted on either that measure or a competing bill by Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., that would give a specially appointed board authority for putting the Postal Service back in the black.

Sierra Graduates from Air Force Basic Training

SAN ANTONIO — Air Force Airman Jorge L. Sierra graduated from basic military training at Lackland Air Force Base, San Antonio, Texas.

The airman completed an intensive, eight-week program that included training in military discipline and studies, Air Force core values, physical fitness, and basic warfare principles and skills.

Airmen who complete basic training earn four credits toward an associate in applied science degree through the Community College of the Air Force.

Sierra is the son of Maria Sierra of Northwest Avenue H, Seminole, and brother of Monse Sierra of Altamont Drive, Houston.

He is a 2011 graduate of Seminole High School.

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