

AG OFFICE DISARRAY

Collapse of trafficking cases shows dysfunction at Paxton's agency. **PAGE A3**



SUNDAY

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DASHES TO ALTAR

Four from Houston's soccer team get bridal shower surprise. **PAGE G1**

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Remaining Citgo 6 captives released

Biden exchanges 5 execs held since 2017 for nephews of Maduro's wife

By Jonathan Limehouse and Amanda Drane
STAFF WRITERS

The last of the so-called Citgo 6 have been freed from prison in Venezuela and are on their way home, bringing resolution to a nearly five-year ordeal.

The release of the Houston oil executives came Saturday after a prisoner swap between the U.S. and Venezuela, whose President Nicolás Maduro demanded in exchange clemency for two family members jailed in the U.S. on drug smuggling convictions.

Negotiations between the U.S. and Venezuela reignited earlier this year as American officials sought new fuel sources after Russia's invasion of Ukraine tightened global supplies and sent energy prices soaring. Venezuela released the first of the six executives of Houston-based Citgo Petroleum — Gustavo Cárdenas — in March and the U.S. began to ease crippling sanc-

tions against the oil-producing nation in May.

The Citgo 6 executives were ensnared in Venezuela in 2017, lured there for what they were told was a budget meeting for PDVSA, the state-owned Venezuelan oil company and Citgo parent company.

Once in Venezuela, they were arrested by masked men with rifles. **Citgo 6 continues on A6**



Marie D. De Jesús/Staff photographer
Vanessa Zambrano holds a photo of her father, Alirio, one of the Citgo 6 freed from Venezuela.



Photos by Jerry Lara/Staff photographer

Migrants board a Chicago-bound bus provided by Gov. Greg Abbott's office at Mission: Border Hope in Eagle Pass.

Abbott, O'Rourke score hits

In lone debate, rivals pound home attacks

By Jeremy Wallace
AUSTIN BUREAU



Gov. Greg Abbott and Beto O'Rourke debated Friday.

After an hour of debating, neither Gov. Greg Abbott nor Beto O'Rourke landed any knockout punch that is likely to shake up the race much.

But that doesn't mean both candidates weren't able to score major points in trying to define the other during their one and only face-to-face battle. Throughout Friday night's debate in Edinburg, Abbott labeled O'Rourke a flip-flopper while O'Rourke continually emphasized that Abbott has had eight **Debate continues on A21**

ON A BUS TO UNKNOWN

Journalists follow migrants to Chicago to learn about their experiences

By Sam González Kelly
STAFF WRITER

Rumors had been floating around the Eagle Pass migrant shelter for days that a free bus would take people to Chicago, but so far, none of the hundreds of visitors there had any idea of when. Many had stayed in the windowless warehouse overnight, eating ham-and-cheese sandwiches, calling their families and sleeping on mats on the floor.

At least a dozen people approached us for answers.

"Perdóname, pero no sabemos," we told them. "Queremos saber lo mismo que ustedes." (Sorry, but we don't know. We're trying to figure out the same thing.)

As journalists for the Houston Chronicle and San Antonio Express-News, we'd set out to follow one of Gov. Greg Abbott's Operation Lone Star buses offering asylum seekers rides to liberal northern cities to get a sense of what



A father, in white, reunites with his son, who rode one of the buses, at Chicago's Union Station on Sept. 23.

it's like for the thousands of people thrust into the center of a national debate.

Abbott's busing program has been the subject of intense disputes and accusations of callous inhumanity. Though immigration experts say the trips are "stunts," they also say they are likely beneficial to most who participate. For

the people directly affected, those arguments take a back seat to more pressing questions.

"The politics don't really matter to me. We're doing this because we don't have money, and we just want to get to work," said Enrique Josue Tovar, of Venezuela. Like others we'd meet on the journey, Tovar spoke to us in Spanish.

Tovar, 30, had sacrificed a lot to make it across the border. He tried to feed his family by selling his two motorcycles after the economy collapsed, but the money soon ran out and he felt that he had no choice but to try his luck in the United States. The gruesome things he saw crossing through the Darien Gap, the lawless jungle travelers refer to as La Selva, still keep him up at night: a pregnant woman who died after impaling herself on a stake, and others who lost limbs. He doesn't have a phone anymore; he broke it saving a Cuban man who nearly drowned crossing the Rio **Bus trip continues on A10**

City pays millions in overtime

By St. John Barned-Smith and Brendon Derr
STAFF WRITERS

Vahid Jafari stayed busy last year.

The Houston police officer worked 2,070 hours of overtime, or more than \$155,000 in overtime pay, in addition to the \$62,961 he earned from his assignment in the department's Hobby Airport Division. Records show he earned that money working shifts to help fill staffing shortages, escorting crime victims to court, picking up and dropping off equipment, working traffic or security at CO- **Overtime continues on A29**

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