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Houston Regional Group

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November 22, 2019

Oil & Gas EIS Project
Mr. Robert Potts
Natural Resources and Planning Team Leader
National Forests and Grasslands in Texas
2221 North Raguet
Lufkin, Texas 75904

Dear Rob,

The Houston Regional Group and Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club (Sierra Club) provide these additional scoping comments for the U.S. Forest Service (FS) oil/gas leasing environmental impact statement (OGLEIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) for the National Forests and Grasslands in Texas (NFGT). The Sierra Club appreciates that the NFGT is preparing this OGLEIS and we want to participate and collaborate during this process.

1) There are several more articles that the Sierra Club provides to the FS.

1. "Big Oil looking to sell \$27 billion in global assets", Jordan Blum, Houston Chronicle, November 19, 2019.

This article shows that the nature of oil/gas exploitation, "boom and bust", is causing even the largest companies to sell off their assets and retrench.

2. "Climatic ailments", Earthweek, Houston Chronicle, November 17, 2019.

This article documents how climate change has and will affect public health due to disease range extensions.

3. "Shale sector is shrinking for its own survival", Jordan Blum, Houston Chronicle, November 16, 2019.

This article documents how shale oil/gas companies are reducing jobs.

4. "Oil industry in Texas still trimming jobs", Erin Douglas, Houston Chronicle, November 16, 2019.

"When we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the universe." *John Muir* ¹

This article documents how jobs are being reduced in the oil/gas sector.

Most of the articles above show that investment in oil/gas is risky and subject to "boom and bust" cycles that throw people out of work and degrade community economics and cohesion.

2) The Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ) NEPA implementing regulations require that mitigation and monitoring occur. These requirements are spelled out in:

1. **Section 1500.1 Purpose, (c)**, "The NEPA process is intended to help public officials make decisions that are based on understanding of environmental consequences, and take actions that protect, restore, and enhance the environment. These regulations provide the direction to achieve this purpose."
2. **Section 1500.2 Policy, (e)**, "Use the NEPA process to identify and assess the reasonable alternatives to proposed actions that will avoid or minimize adverse effects of these actions upon the quality of the human environment."
3. **Section 1500.2 Policy, (f)**, "Use all practicable means, consistent with the requirements of the Act and other essential considerations of national policy, to restore and enhance the quality of the human environment and avoid or minimize any possible adverse effects of their actions upon the quality of the human environment."
4. **Section 1502.1 Purpose**, "The primary purpose of an environmental impact statement is to serve as an action-forcing device to insure that the policies and goals defined in the act are infused into the ongoing programs and actions of the federal government. It shall provide full and fair discussion of significant environmental impacts and shall inform decisionmakers and the public of the reasonable alternatives which would avoid or minimize adverse impacts or enhance the quality of the human environment."
5. **Section 1502.14 Alternatives including the proposed action, (f)**, "Include appropriate mitigation measures not already included in the proposed action or alternatives."
6. **Section 1502.16 Environmental Consequences, (e)**, "Energy requirements and conservation potential of various alternatives and mitigation measures."
7. **Section 1502.16 Environmental Consequences, (f)**, "Natural or depletable resource requirements and conservation potential of various alternatives and mitigation measures."
8. **Section 1502.16 Environmental Consequences, (g)**, "Urban quality, historic and cultural resources, and the design of the built environment, including the reuse and conservation potential of various alternatives and mitigation measures."
9. **Section 1502.16 Environmental Consequences, (h)**, "Means to mitigate adverse environmental impacts (if not fully covered under Section 1502.14(f))."

10. **Section 1503.3 Specificity of comments, (d)**, "When a cooperating agency with jurisdiction by law objects to or expresses reservations about the proposal on grounds of environmental impacts, the agency expressing the objection or reservation shall specify the mitigation measures it considers necessary to allow the agency to grant or approve applicable permit, license, or related requirements or concurrences."

11. **Section 1504.2 Criteria for referral, (f)**, "Environmental referrals should be made to the Council ... In determining what environmental objections to the matter are appropriate to refer to the Council, an agency should weight potential adverse environmental impacts, considering: (f) Availability of environmentally preferable alternatives".

12. **Section 1504.3 Procedure for referrals and response, (c)(2)(vi)**, "Give the referring agency's recommendations as to what mitigation alternative, further study, or other course of action (including abandonment of the matter) are necessary to remedy the situation."

13. **Section 1505.2 Record of decision in cases requiring environmental impact statements, (b)**, "Identify all alternatives considered by the agency in reaching its decision, specifying the alternative or alternatives which were considered to be environmentally preferable."

14. **Section 1505.2 Record of decision in cases requiring environmental impact statements, (c)**, "State whether all practicable means to avoid or minimize environmental harm from the alternative selected have been adopted, and if not, why they were not. A monitoring and enforcement program shall be adopted and summarized where applicable for any mitigation."

15. **Section 1505.3 Implementing the decision**, "Agencies may provide for monitoring to assure that their decisions are carried out and should do so in important cases. Mitigation (Section 1505.2(c)) and other conditions established in the environmental impact statement or during its review and committed a part of the decision shall be implemented by the lead agency or other appropriate consenting agency."

16. **Section 1505.3 Implementing the decision, (b)**, "The lead agency shall: (b) Condition finding of actions on mitigation."

17. **Section 1505.3 Implementing the decision, (c)**, "Upon request, inform cooperating or commenting agencies on progress in carrying out mitigation measures which they have proposed and which were adopted by the agency making the decision."

18. **Section 1505.3 Implementing the decision, (d)**, "Upon request, make available to the public the results of relevant monitoring."

19. **Section 1508.20 Mitigation, (a) through (e)**, "Mitigation includes: (a) Avoiding the impact altogether by not taking a certain action or parts of an action. (b) Minimizing

impacts by limiting the degree or magnitude of the action and its implementation. (c) Rectifying the impact by repairing, rehabilitating, or restoring the affected environment. (d) Reducing or eliminating the impact over time by preservation and maintenance operations during the life of the action. (e) Compensating for the impact by replacing or providing substitute resources or environments.”

20. Section 1508.25 Scope, (b)(3), “Scope consists of the range of actions, and impacts to be considered in an environmental impact statement ... (b) Alternatives, which include: (3) Mitigation measures (not in the proposed action).”

The FS should ensure that the appropriate mitigation and monitoring, the right amount of the mitigation and monitoring, and the documentation of mitigation and monitoring is done for the OGLEIS. The FS should release to the public, periodically, updates about mitigation and monitoring, their effectiveness, and whether more is needed.

3) The Sierra Club wants to look at the scoping comments that have been submitted for the OGLEIS. If the scoping comments are put on the NFGT website, the Sierra Club can look at these comments there. If that is going to occur, when will it happen? If the FS is not going to put the public scoping comments on the website or this will be done at a much later date, the Sierra Club requests that it be allowed to review the scoping comments at the NFGT office in January.

4) The Sierra Club requests a meeting with the FS about the proposed stipulations and other information that is on the maps that were sent. The Sierra Club appreciates that the FS sent these maps. The maps that the FS sent to the Sierra Club are: Existing Leases, Existing Stipulations, Decision Area and Key Resources, and Proposed Stipulations. The Sierra Club would like to have the Texas Conservation Alliance present at this meeting where discussion, questions, and comments about the maps is considered.

For Sam Houston National Forest (SHNF), the Sierra Club has questions about Longleaf Pine Compartments, Flatwoods Compartments, Clear Creek, Neblett Creek, Baygall and similar wetland areas, blackland prairies, lakes, Lone Star Hiking Trail, other hiking trails, and other trails, proposed special management areas, Winters Bayou Scenic Area, and other topics.

The maps do not clearly show where private minerals are versus public minerals, where they are mixed, and the interaction between the two. The Sierra Club has asked the FS for a map that clearly shows where the public minerals and private minerals are. The Sierra Club requests that the FS provide it with this map.

The Sierra Club appreciates this opportunity to provide these additional initial scoping comments about the OGLEIS. Thank you.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brandt Mannchen". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized 'B' and 'M'.

Brandt Mannchen
Forest Management Issue Chair
Lone Star Chapter of the Sierra Club
Chair, Forestry Subcommittee
Houston Regional Group of the Sierra Club
20923 Kings Clover Court
Humble, Texas 77346
281-570-7212
brandt_mannchen@comcast.net

BUSINESS

HOUSTON CHRONICLE • TUESDAY, NOVEMBER 19, 2019 • SECTION B ★★

● **DOW:** 28,036.22, up 31.33 (0.1%) | ● **S&P:** 3,122.03, up 1.57 (0.1%) | ● **OIL:** \$57.05, down 6¢ (-1.2%) | ● **NATURAL GAS:** \$2.566, down 12.2¢ (-4.5%)

WeWork set to lay off thousands

Company trying to right itself after heavy financial losses, canceled IPO

By Peter Eavis
and Mike Isaac
NEW YORK TIMES

WeWork is preparing to cut at least 4,000 people from its workforce as it tries to stabilize itself after the company's breakneck growth racked up heavy losses and led it to the brink of collapse, two people with knowledge of the matter said.

The cuts are expected to be announced as early as this week and will take place across WeWork's sprawling global operation. Under the plan, the company's core business of subletting office space would lay off 2,000 to 2,500 employees, one of the people said. An additional 1,000 employees will leave as WeWork sells or closes down noncore businesses, such as a private school in Man-

hattan that it set up. Additionally, roughly 1,000 building maintenance employees will be transferred to an outside contractor. Together, these employees would represent around a third of the 12,500 people WeWork employed at the end of June.

But one of the people said the company could shed as many as 5,000 to 6,000 employees.

Executive Chairman Marcelo Claure told staff in an email Monday that the process, which will involve eliminating and scaling back some functions and respon-

sibilities, "will make us stronger and better able to generate even more opportunities over the coming months and years."

The staff reductions will be included in a five-year plan to overhaul WeWork that could be presented to employees as early as today, said the people, who spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss the layoff plans.

The layoffs represent the human cost of a remarkable reversal in WeWork's fortunes. Under its co-founder and former CEO, Adam Neumann, the company piled

billions of dollars into an erratic expansion that included adding huge office spaces in the world's most expensive cities, offering discounts to lure tenants and buying other businesses. WeWork, which leases office space from landlords, refurbishes it and rents it out to its customers, shelved plans for an initial public offering in late September after investors were put off by the company's losses and had questions about its corporate governance.

SoftBank, the Japanese con-
WeWork continues on B7

RETAIL

Battle for holiday workers underway as season looms



Justine Griffin / Tribune News Service

Target is among the companies using mobile technology to recruit seasonal help. Retailers are looking for any edge to hire and hang on to good workers during the holidays.

Signs show that hiring may stagnate or even decline this year

By Jackie Crosby
TRIBUNE NEWS SERVICE

A mixed picture of holiday hiring is emerging, even as mega-retailers such as Target Corp. aim for a record number of temporary workers to handle a hoped-for sales surge in the next two months.

Retailers added 18 percent more workers in October than they did during the same month a year ago, according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics. But jobs in transportation and warehouses plunged 17 percent,



Big Oil looking to sell \$27 billion in global assets

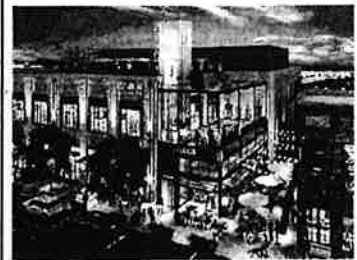
By Jordan Blum
STAFF WRITER

Big Oil companies aim to unload about \$27 billion in oil and gas assets worldwide to cut costs and focus spending on their core projects as the industry retrenches in the face of lackluster oil prices and concerns about weakening oil demand, according to a new report.

U.S. energy major Exxon Mobil and Chevron, for instance, are concentrating their oil and gas spending on their most promising prospects. Both companies are investing heavily in the Permian Basin in West Texas. Exxon also is targeting offshore oil fields of the South American nation of Guyana while Chevron is focusing on oil fields in Kazakhstan in Central Asia, according to a report from the Norwegian research company Rystad Energy.

This is all part of a broader trend of financial discipline in the energy sector to promote shareholder confidence and woo Wall Street investors back to

Big Oil continues on B7



Lovett Commercial

"Entertainment" concept Punch Bowl Social will open at Sawyer Yards.

Punch Bowl Social plans to take a dip in Houston scene

By Nancy Sarnoff
STAFF WRITER

running counter to years of growth fueled by booming e-commerce sales.

Signs point to a holiday hiring season that could stagnate or even decline this year.

"It says more about the labor market than it does about the desire to hire," said Andrew Challenger, vice president of global outplacement firm Challenger, Gray & Christmas, which suspects that traditional retailers might never again hire the numbers they once did, particularly as warehouse work becomes more automated.

Yet staffing remains the critical component for retailers of all sizes in



Mark Lennihan / Associated Press file

A UPS employee loads packages onto a truck at a company facility in New York. Online shopping is still growing at a double-digit rate.

what can be a make-or-break shopping season. Consumers said they plan to spend an average of \$1,047.83 this holiday season, up 4 percent from last year, according to an annual survey by the National Retail Federation and Prosper Insights & Analytics.

The battle for workers is well un-

derway. Stores at the Mall of America have put up signs and set up application tables as the retail workforce amps up from 1,000 to about 13,000 during the holidays, a mall spokeswoman said. Kohl's began recruiting last summer to get a jump on the sea-

Hiring continues on B5

Punch Bowl Social, a Denver-based chain of entertainment and dining venues, plans to open by the end of next year at Sawyer Yards, an arts-centric enclave northwest of downtown.

The Punch Bowl concept, which is heavily marketed to millennials and the younger Gen Z cohort, has dining and bar options, along with ping pong, darts, board games, classic video games, bowling lanes and private karaoke rooms. It's part of a retail category referred to as "eatertainment."

CEO Robert Thompson said there's not a typical customer experience at Punch Bowl. You might go for a drink and end up staying for karaoke. Or you might be part of a 500-person corporate event.

"People always think about us as this boozy place for millennials. That's true, but we do a lot of Satur-

Punch continues on B8

STATE YOUR CASE

Navigating inheritance when husband is not on the deed

Q: I don't understand why my husband, who had nothing to do with buying my home, can have any claim to it when I die. Is there any way my son can get my home instead of my husband? If my husband is allowed to stay in my home, why does he get to stay for free and not pay for the upkeep?

A: If you die before your husband, Texas law gives your husband the right to live in your home for as long as he wants. He can stay there for a week, leave for a year, come back for a week, and then leave again for years. It is essentially his home until he dies or abandons it.



RONALD LIPMAN

Your son doesn't actually get cut out. The way the law works, your son will own the home, but for as long as your husband is alive, your son can't take possession of the home or use it in any way, unless allowed by your husband.

Your husband can even remarry, and he and his bride can live in your home. But if your husband dies before she does, his homestead rights don't transfer to her. At that point, your son would get the home, and she would have to move out.

While your husband is living in

the home, he doesn't have to pay rent to your son. But he also doesn't get to stay for free, as he must pay for the upkeep and property taxes. If you still have a mortgage, he must pay the interest on the mortgage, but your son would have to make the principal payments. Your son would also have to pay for the homeowner's insurance.

You do have options.

You can move to another state where the laws are more in your favor.

You can sell the home and then rent a home or apartment.

You can ask your husband to sign a post-nuptial agreement where he waives his homestead

right. Of course, that might be something he would refuse to do, and if that happens, the next option might be appropriate for you.

You can get divorced. Once the divorce is final, he will have no right whatsoever to your home.

You can also give or sell your home to your son now and then rent from him. But be aware, this option has risks. Importantly, the home would no longer be protected from creditors' claims.

And you would lose your property tax homestead exemption.

Your son might declare bankruptcy, or sell the home, or die before you and give the home to his wife or someone else. He could

charge you exorbitant rent, or he could even boot you out and force you to find another place to live.

The information in this column is intended to provide a general understanding of the law, not legal advice. Readers with legal problems, including those whose questions are addressed here, should consult attorneys for advice on their particular circumstances. Ronald Lipman of the Houston law firm Lipman & Associates is board-certified in estate planning and probate law by the Texas Board of Legal Specialization. Email questions to stateyourcase@lipmanpc.com.

BUSINESS

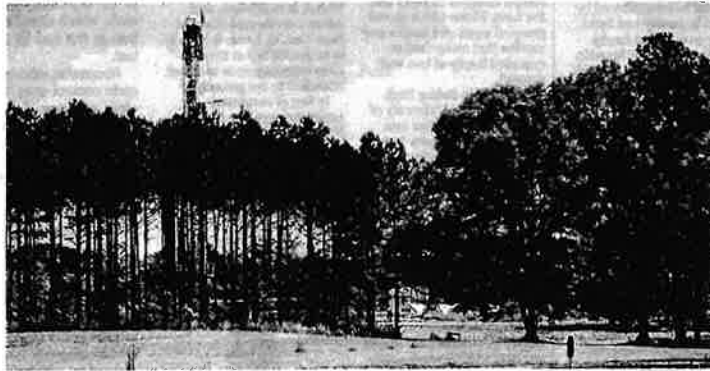
BIG OIL

From page B1

the oil and gas sector, which in recent years built a reputation for profligacy. After years of overspending and underperformance, investor sentiment has soured on the industry.

After spending \$10.5 billion last year to buy the Texas shale assets of BHP, the British oil major BP aims to sell other assets in the U.S., including in the San Juan Basin in northwestern New Mexico. Houston's ConocoPhillips already plans to sell its newer position in the Louisiana Austin Chalk for less than \$1 billion after the initial well results fell short of expectations.

Exxon Mobil has the most for sale as it intends to divest \$15 billion of assets by 2021. The company recently sold its Norwegian North Sea holdings for \$4.5 billion. It also is selling its position in the North Sea offshore of the U.K. for up to \$2 billion, as well as



Brett Coomer / Staff file photo

A well site is set up in the Austin Chalk in Louisiana. Houston's ConocoPhillips plans to sell its newer position in that field for under \$1 billion after initial well results fell short of expectations.

certain Gulf of Mexico assets and additional holdings in Australia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Nigeria and Azerbaijan.

"While oil and gas majors in-

crease their focus on core areas and divest mature assets and interests in geopolitically unstable regions," said Rystad analyst Ranjan Saxena, "observers will

be following closely to see how investors react and what other steps these energy giants will take to keep stakeholders interested amid rising climate con-

cerns and geopolitical volatility." Chevron aims to sell its stake in offshore Nigerian fields for close to \$2 billion.

Independents' chance

BP also is interested in selling assets in the U.K. and Kazakhstan, while Royal Dutch Shell may sell its positions in Egypt and Indonesia.

The French energy major Total is buying the African assets of Houston's Occidental Petroleum — acquired from Oxy buying Anadarko Petroleum — for \$8.8 billion, including a liquefied natural gas project in Mozambique. As a result, Total is looking to unload other assets, such as acreage in the Netherlands and Nigeria.

"The expected transactions mean some of the majors are poised to exit certain regions," Saxena said, "giving regional players and independents a chance to buy into key fields."

Jordan.blum@chron.com

LIFE TRIBUTES

JOAN BLAKE STRASBURGER PURDOM

1926-2019

Joan Purdom of Conroe, Texas passed away peacefully in Houston on November 17, 2019 at the age of 93. Born Joan Inglis Blake on March 21, 1926 in East Orange, New Jersey to Charles Gillespie Blake and Edith Inglis Blake, she graduated from West Orange High School in 1943 and attended the Katharine Gibbs School in New York in the days when the students wore long white gloves, hats, pearls and heels. Meticulous with numbers, extremely organized, and poised, she became the assistant to the Advertising Manager of Fieldcrest Mills in New York. She married Samuel M. Strasburger, Jr. in 1949 after a two-year engagement during which Sam worked in China. Joan's and Sam's mothers had been childhood friends; their grandfathers served on the Spring Valley, New York School Board together. Joan first met Sam when they were children, but did not see him again until he was a student at Johns Hopkins University and about to leave for military service in North Africa and Europe during World War II.

Joan and Sam led an exciting life of travel and adventure during Sam's career with Standard Oil of New Jersey, later Standard Vacuum, Esso Eastern, and Exxon. They lived in Ceylon, Vietnam, England, Pakistan, and Japan. Joan held a Vietnam driver's license, having taken the examination in French. Joan was always involved in local charities and was a frequent and expert hostess, entertaining business colleagues, local leaders, and visiting dignitaries includ-

ing then Vice President and Mrs. Richard M. Nixon, and then Vice President and Mrs. Lyndon B. Johnson (who reported that the weather in Saigon was as hot and humid as that in Texas). Joan and Sam traveled extensively during those years, including frequent trips to Hong Kong and Hawaii — they were in Honolulu the day Hawaii became the 50th state. In 1964, while living in Pakistan, Joan had her first and only child, John Blake Strasburger. When the family returned to the United States, they lived in Maryland, New Jersey, and New York, before settling in Texas.

After being widowed for 13 years, Joan married Robert Don Purdom, himself a recent widower, in 1986. They enjoyed 15 years together traveling, cooking, and spending time with friends and family.

Joan was active in the Conroe community throughout the years she lived in Texas. She was a member of the First Presbyterian Church in Conroe for over 40 years and held various leadership positions. She was a soprano who sang in the church choir every week until just recently. Over the years she served in many leadership positions and contributed her talents to a variety of organizations including: The Assistance League of Montgomery County, The Montgomery County Performing Arts Society, the Pan American Round Table, the Daughters of the American Revolution, and the Welcome Wagon. Joan was recognized as the Montgomery County Woman of the Year in 1977. She



frequently hosted performing artists in her home when they traveled to Conroe for music competitions.

Joan found joy in the simple pleasures of life — working crossword puzzles, singing, playing the piano, reading, working in the garden, and visiting family and friends, especially during her many trips to Chatham, Massachusetts. She had a true gift for perspective and lived life always feeling blessed. She was always elegant, pleasant, and never judgmental. She had many very dear friends who looked after her always, and she was proud that she lived independently in her home until after her 93rd birthday.

Joan was predeceased by her parents; her sister Margaret ("Peggy") Blake Storer and husband Alfred C. Storer of Chatham, Massachusetts; her husband Samuel M. Strasburger, Jr.; Sam's sister Jane Strasburger Dorman and husband Douglas V. Dorman of Lutherville, Maryland; her husband Robert Don Purdom and Don's children Rob Purdom and Lisa Purdom. She is survived by her son John Blake Strasburger, Sr. and wife Pa-

mela Stewart Strasburger of Houston; her grandchildren Samantha Jane Strasburger and John Blake Strasburger, Jr.; and numerous nephews and nieces. Joan is also survived by Don's son Miles Purdom; daughter-in-law Lori Purdom; grandchildren Kay Lynn Purdom, Trei Brundrett and his wife Danielle, Caitlin Carlson, and Christian Carlson; and five great grandchildren.

In lieu of flowers, the family requests that any donations be made in Joan's memory to The Assistance League of Montgomery County (Texas), the First Presbyterian Church Conroe (Texas), or the charity of your choice.

A Celebration of Life Service will be held on Thursday November 21, 2019 at 2PM, at the First Presbyterian Church, 2727 N Loop 336 W, Conroe, Texas with an interment to follow at Conroe Memorial Park, 1600 Porter Rd., Conroe, Texas 77301.

Metcalf Funeral Directors

Fourth & Greenview

Dignity

980 E. White Oak Terrace, Conroe, (936) 756-3111



Courtesy CoVil Office Properties

WeWork occupies 254,000 square feet of office space in three Houston submarkets, including the \$6,000 it leases at Galleria Office Tower I.

WEWORK

From page B1

glomerate that is WeWork's largest outside shareholder, last month announced a plan to bail out the company and is now trying to stabilize the business. But it is not clear how far the plan, which rests on selling billions of dollars of new WeWork bonds to investors, has progressed. The prices of the company's existing bonds have tumbled in recent days, a sign that investors are worried about its prospects.

WeWork last week reported that it lost \$1.25 billion in the three months that ended in September, more than twice as much as the company had lost in the

Times. WeWork has assured employees that every member of its cleaning and facilities teams will keep their jobs and receive the same level of pay and comparable benefits. But employees who choose not to transfer will lose their jobs and receive no severance, according to a document provided to employees that was reviewed by the Times.

The changes have unnerved many employees, according to interviews with workers and Slack messages reviewed by the Times, stirring fears that some staff members will eventually lose benefits or be forced to work different schedules.

In the Slack messages, one WeWork facilities staff member said that hearing

JOHN (JACK) WILLIAM MOHR

1967-2019

John (Jack) William Mohr, age 52, of Midland, died on Thursday, November 14, 2019 in Spring, TX as a victim of violent crime. Funeral service will be held on Thursday, November 21, 2019 at 10:00 AM at the Midland Funeral Home, 1000 N. Midland Ave., Midland, TX 79701.



ELAINE LEVY PROLER

1930-2019

It is with great sadness that we announce the passing of our mother Elaine L. Proler



NOVEMBER 21, 2019 at 1:00 PM at The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 4805 Gateway St in Midland, TX. Burial will be held in a family plot in Modoc County, California.

Jack was born on March 27, 1967 to parents Hans and Annette Mohr in Stanford, California. In high school, he was a dedicated student, athlete and musician participating in football, track and field, and choir. Jack attended Brigham Young University where he obtained a bachelor's and master's degrees in Mechanical Engineering. While at school, Jack was an All-American track and field athlete, as a competitor in the hammer, shotput and discus. He served as a missionary in the Finland Helsinki Mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. Following his marriage to Marianne Matis in 1991, Jack attended Texas A&M University and obtained a doctoral degree in Mechanical Engineering. After graduation, Jack began his career with ExxonMobil in Houston, Texas. While with ExxonMobil, Jack's family moved to Melbourne, Australia working with Esso and to Midland, Texas working with XTO. His current position was as a manager in the Global Well Management Group for ExxonMobil.



Jack served the community through his efforts with the Boy Scouts of America and his leadership in church callings. He was a kind, honest man who was quick to forgive and loved the Permian Basin. Jack will be remembered for his gentle nature and fierce loyalty to wife and family.

He is survived by his wife, Marianne Mohr of Midland, daughter Madelyn Waldron and husband Conner, son Darryl Mohr, son Kent Mohr and daughter Colleen Mohr, parents Hans and Annette Mohr, brother Karl Mohr and wife Brenda, sister Gail Rouse and husband Howard and numerous nieces and nephews.

Pallbearers will be Kyle Mohr, Timothy Mohr, Paul Mohr, Sam Rouse, Tim Matis and Conner Waldron.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests memorials be donated to Latter-Day Saint Charities Humanitarian Aid Fund and Boy Scouts of America.

Arrangements are under the direction of Nalley-Pickle & Welch Funeral Home & Crematory of Midland. Online condolences can be made at www.npwelch.com.

after a valiant fight with glioblastoma.

Elaine is survived by her children: Terry Loughran and Philip Solomon, her brother Irvin "Bubba" Levy. Grandchildren Matthew Loughran and Lindsay Powers and two great grandchildren.

Born in Houston at St. Joseph Hospital to Mary and Joe Levy, Elaine had a special group of aunts and uncles and cousins that comprised an extended family of love and support.

She went to Boling High School and The University of Texas majoring in fine arts. An education that was apparent in her tastes and styles.

To those who really knew her, she had a quiet grace and grit that followed to her loved ones.

She is predeceased by her parents and daughter Karen Ann Weintraub (1996).

Elaine leaves a legacy of love, hope, honesty, integrity and caring.

We will remember how fortunate we were to have shared our lives with this loving lady. She was a wonderful mother, daughter, grandmother, sister, aunt and friend. We will miss her greatly.



An interment service is to be conducted at a half-past ten o'clock this morning, Tuesday, the 19th of November, at Emanuel Memorial Park, 8941 Bissonnet Street in Houston, where Rabbi Roy Walter, is to officiate, and where a uniformed Steward from Geo. H. Lewis & Sons is to be positioned at the cemetery entrance, so as to direct attendees to the gravesite.

In lieu of customary remembrances, the family requests that memorial contributions be directed to the American Cancer Society, P.O. Box 22478, Oklahoma City, OK 73123, or the charity of one's choice.

Please visit Elaine's online tribute at GeoHLewis.com where memories and words of comfort and condolence may be shared electronically with her family.



Geo. H. Lewis & Sons

www.geohlewis.com, 713.789.3005



CEMETERY LOTS

Breckside, Sec 2, 4 & 6, Memory Garden \$8,495 ea 713-686-5073

Forest Park E. & Sec. 21A, Lot 415, Monument only. Hear read. \$366 ea. 713-424-8940

WOODLAWN Garden Of Memories East 1/2 Unit D, Lot 89, Block 51 2 flat marker spaces, \$3,850 713-819-6305

CEMETERY LOTS

Forest Park Westheimer, 2 adjacent plots, Sec. 500 lot 42, space 5 & 6. Stacking is an option. Valued \$1895. Sell for \$4500 each for \$12,000 both 713-425-9756

Memory Keeps Loved Ones Ever near us!

same period a year earlier. A corporate presentation provided to investors revealed that WeWork opened nearly half of its locations in the 12 months that ended in September. Many of these locations are losing money and are likely to be depleting WeWork's cash, which stood at \$2 billion at the end of September.

Neumann, who agreed to cede control over WeWork after stepping down from the CEO post in September, stands to receive an exit package worth around \$1 billion. As part of that, he will receive a \$185 million consulting fee for four years and can sell nearly \$1 billion of his shares in the company to SoftBank. The soft landing for Neumann deepened anger among employees as the layoffs loomed.

During the recent tumult at the company, employees formed a group, the WeWorkers Coalition, that, among other things, is pressing for severance packages for departing employees that it considers equitable.

Starting Dec. 9, cleaning and facilities jobs at WeWork will be outsourced to JLL, a real estate services company, or one of its partners, according to an email sent to affected staff members last week that was reviewed by the New York

about the outsourcing was like being informed of a death in the family. Another employee said the decision showed that management was unconcerned about the workers' welfare and was making decisions based on what would save the company the most money.

It was unclear how the company's Houston operations would be affected.

WeWork occupies 254,000 square feet of office space in three local submarkets. It has leased 56,000 square feet at 2700 Post Oak Blvd., also known as Galleria Tower I; 52,000 square feet at 1725 Hughes Landing Blvd. in The Woodlands; and 86,000 square feet in downtown's Jones Building at 708 Main. The company's latest lease was for 56,000 square feet in downtown's 609 Main, which is owned by Hines.

The company is not the dominant flexible office space provider in Houston. That title belongs to Regus, which has more than 700,000 square feet across the area, according to a recent report from CBRE. But in terms of transaction size, WeWork has leased the largest blocks of space here in the last couple years among flexible and coworking providers.

Staff writer Nancy Sarnoff contributed.

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Dickinson advances
in playoffs **PAGE C1**



Harden scores 44 in
win over Pacers **PAGE C1**

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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Ex-envoy claims Trump intimidation

She tells panel Giuliani, corrupt Ukraine prosecutor worked to oust her

By Sheryl Gay Stolberg
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — The former U.S. ambassador to Ukraine told the House impeachment inquiry Friday that she felt threatened by President Donald Trump and “shocked, appalled, devastated” that he vilified her in a call with another foreign leader, as Trump attacked her in real time on Twitter, drawing a stern warning about witness intimidation from Democrats.

The extraordinary back-and-forth unfolded on the second day of public impeachment hearings as Marie Yovanovitch, who was ousted as the envoy to Ukraine on

Inside

Trump ally Stone is found guilty,
faces prison sentence. **Page A7**

Trump’s orders, detailed a campaign by the president’s allies to undermine her as she pushed to promote democracy and the rule of law.

In deeply personal terms, Yovanovitch described to the House Intelligence Committee how Rudy Giuliani, Trump’s personal lawyer, worked hand in hand with a corrupt Ukrainian prosecutor to circumvent official channels, smear her and push her out of her job.

Her testimony came amid only the third impeachment inquiry in

modern U.S. history. It capped the first week of public hearings as Democrats seek to make their case that Trump abused his power to enlist Ukraine’s help in discrediting his political rivals, chiefly former Vice President Joe Biden. House Speaker Nancy Pelosi this week called it “bribery,” echoing the language in the Constitution that describes impeachable offenses.

Yovanovitch’s public testimony, which played out over more than five hours in a packed and hushed House Ways and Means Committee room, was an indictment of foreign policy in the Trump era, outlining the potential harm to U.S. di-

Envoy continues on A3



Evan Vucci / Associated Press and Andrew Harnet / Bloomberg

President Donald Trump attacked former Ambassador Marie Yovanovitch on Twitter in real time as she testified in the inquiry.

Quackdown on ducks divides Pearland



Photos by Steve Gonzales / Staff photographer

A duck takes flight to avoid being hit while crossing Northfork Drive in Pearland on Wednesday. In pockets of the city, a long-simmering battle has built over the number of Muscovy ducks waddling through neighborhoods.

By Emily Foxhall
and Rebecca Hennes
STAFF WRITERS

PEARLAND — Ericka Pulido Lemuz slowed her GMC truck while

City tells rankled residents
how to lawfully get rid of
bird, but others cry fowl

trash bags left curbside for pickup. One nested this week in a potted plant at Iguanas Ranas Cantina.

Enough people threatened to take matters into their own hands that the city of Pearland on Nov. 1

Inmate granted a stay of execution

Court decision follows
rare bipartisan outcry
on behalf of prisoner

By Taylor Goldenstein
AUSTIN BUREAU

The death penalty case of Rodney Reed took a turn in his favor Friday as the Texas Court of Criminal Appeals stayed his execution and sent the case back to the trial court for further review.

The 51-year-old Reed was previously set for lethal injection Wednesday evening for the 1996 killing of 19-year-old Stacey Sides.

More executions have taken place in Texas than any other state in recent years — and yet Reed’s case has captured the attention of celebrities and politicians from both sides of the aisle.

Reality TV star Kim Kardashian visited him Friday for two hours on death row.

But what is it about this case that’s caused not just big-name celebrities including Beyoncé and Oprah but also conservatives such as Texas Sen. Ted Cruz to ask that officials take more time to review it?

And not just that — bipartisan groups of state lawmakers have al-

rushing her daughter to school Tuesday and gasped. She had seen what she thought were two ducks crossing West Oaks Circle East — a common occurrence in this neighborhood. Nearing the animals, the 38-year-old realized they were dead.

Again? she thought. Her 8-year-old daughter, Emma, started to cry.

In pockets of Pearland, a long-strumming war has built over the white and dark-emerald Muscovy ducks that make homes in residents' flower beds. They poop on porches. They litter feathers on mowed lawns. They tear open



Martha Larson said she faces a daily \$200 fine if she leaves out food for the ducks.

issued a news release telling residents how lawfully to get rid of the poultry plaguing them. The messaging spun so out of control that some thought, wrongly, that residents could gun ducks down in neighborhoods.

The duck-haters, as it were, were fed up. They were tired of picking up packages inadvertently deposited on duck feces. Tired of hosing off excrement-covered mailboxes. Tired of waiting for the bigger birds, males too fat to fly, to waddle from the driveway so they can back out.

Ducks continues on A14

so urged Republican Gov. Greg Abbott to grant Reed a reprieve. The Polk County Republican Party earlier this month passed a resolution in support of clemency.

This type of widespread bipartisan outcry is unprecedented, experts said.

"When you see conservative supporters of capital punishment seeking to intervene, that's really unusual," said Robert Dunham, executive director of the Death Penalty Information Center. "That almost never happens."

Reed was convicted of raping and strangling Stites while she made her way to work at a supermarket in Bastrop, a rural community about 30 miles southeast of Austin.

Reed continues on A13



Austin American-Statesman file photo

Rodney Reed was scheduled for lethal injection Wednesday until an appeals court stayed his execution on Friday.

Shale sector is shrinking for its own survival

Industry's restraint means layoffs now, viability in long term

By Jordan Blum
STAFF WRITER

The U.S. shale industry is finally learning to live within its financial means, shrinking to survive amid an environment of depressed crude prices and Wall Street animosity toward nearly

all things oil and gas.

The third quarter's wave of earnings showed that companies are staying within budgets and planning to slice spending levels substantially more next year. Shale oil and gas production continues to rise — but at much slower rates — while drilling activity, as measured by the Baker Hughes rig count, has plunged by 25 percent over a year.

This newfound restraint by an

energy sector known for overspending may lead to better long-term viability, but in the shorter term, it will mean weaker economic growth in Texas and more layoffs throughout the industry — from the Houston skyscrapers to West Texas oil fields. In a rarity for analysts and investors, energy executives were quizzed more about their plans to pay down heavy debt loads than the quality of their oil and gas acreage.

The answers suggested more cutbacks in costs, projects and workers. Already, the retreat in spending by oil and gas companies has cost Texas some 6,000 energy jobs since May, according to government statistics.

"The shale industry is clearly going through a reset," said James West, an energy analyst with Evercore ISI in New York. "It's ugly out there."

The Houston company Occl-

Shale continues on A14

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FROM THE COVER

DUCKS

From page A1

Dead ducks are a frequent sight in the neighborhood, Lemuz said. Residents say drivers intentionally mow down ducklings. Someone else, yet to be caught, has allegedly been exterminating ducks under cover of dark with what might be a bow and arrows, the same crime that occurred two years ago.

What began as a fun neighborhood quirk is, somehow, a great big 2019 issue — reminiscent of battles over feral cats, or, as Jason Korfhage, 41, went as far as to say, immigration. Some people want to care for the ducks here; others, clearly, want to keep them out. Many can't figure out why it's such a problem.

"These people have nothing better to do," said Rachel Hensley, 37, in front of her brick home, exasperated by how suburban adults were behaving. "They're just ducks."

Not giving up easy are the duck-lovers who have long taken care of these not-quite pets, such as the resident who put a kiddie pool out for them to swim in; the woman who bought 100 pounds of bird feed every other week for them to eat; and the neighbor who named a duckling "Danger" and was seen taking it for walks.

They staunchly defend their red-faced, web-footed friends, covering their eggs to protect them, welcoming them when they get home, opening the garage when weather gets bad. Some moved here because of the fowl — they're incensed at being told to stop caring for animals they adore.

The division, evident in heated Facebook spats, can be seen house to house, most clearly in the plastic orange netting dividing two lots. On one side, ducks were defiantly fed. On the other, they're unabashedly unwelcome. Recently, dead ducks were mysteriously left there — witnessed by elementary students on their way to school.

This killing methodology struck 36-year-old Shaun Drever as "a little much."

Pearland, home to about 120,000 people and hundreds of ducks, is not alone in facing this, shall we say, quackmire. A federal rule published in 2010 categorizes the Muscovy duck, or *Cairina moschata*, as an invasive species that can harm native animals, damage property and transmit disease. The rule, in spite of a city law protecting birds, allows for their removal.

Muscovy ducks are domesticated worldwide, said John Kanter, senior wildlife biologist with



Photos by Steve Gonzales / Staff photographer

Residents say drivers intentionally mow down ducklings. According to Pearland officials, the ducks can be taken to three border counties where they're considered natural or they can be killed in a way that complies with weapons and animal cruelty laws.

the National Wildlife Federation. Sometimes they escape or are let loose and find unintended homes near man-made ponds and grassy areas such as those in the suburbs.

According to the city, the ducks can be captured on personal property and taken to three border counties where they're considered natural — Hidalgo, Starr and Zapata. Or they can be killed in some way — unspecified by the city — that complies with weapons and animal cruelty laws.

Animal control employees will pick up the dead ducks but won't catch and remove them alive. Increasingly, they're warning people such as Martha Larson, 78, to stop feeding the ducks or face what she said was a daily \$200 fine. (It can go up to \$2,000.) So far, the city says those warned have complied.

The confrontation had Larson, who grew up on a Kentucky farm, "swelled up like a frog." She almost wanted them to lock her up, she said, and then they'd all be on TV. Were they going to make her stop feeding hummingbirds next? "I never thought I'd live to see this day," she said.

What was a delight to Larson became unpleasant to others. Sarah Riffel, 26, who grew up near Larson on Dogwood, aka "Duck-



A 2010 federal rule categorizes the Muscovy duck as an invasive species that can harm native animals and damage property.

"At the end of the day, do you want to be enemies with your neighbors over ducks?"

Kimberly Rathbun

wood," named the original ducks she found Wallis Simpson, Richard Nixon and Sirius Black. She enlisted the whole phonetic alphabet — Alpha, Bravo, Charlie — naming the next 26.

Neighbors later saw coyotes. Two hawks moved into her chimney, eating ducklings. Her Dachshund named Bentley discovered

one that a hawk dropped, and she had to get a shovel from the garage to bury it. On Aug. 5, she counted 47 ducks in front of her house. Enough was enough.

"We don't want them here anymore," she said. "It's time to get rid of the ducks."

In recent weeks, the duck population may have thinned. This is

to Craig Batcheller's great relief. His 8-year-old grandson has a condition that weakens his immune system. At 2, he got salmonella after playing in the front yard barefoot.

Batcheller, 60, has fought to see the ducks gone. "He got sick here," Batcheller said. "What if it was your child who was sick?"

Homeowners associations for two affected neighborhoods — Westwood Village and West Oaks — declined to comment. The city fields duck calls from Lakes of Highland Glen as well.

A fourth neighborhood, Cabot Cove, apparently got rid of many because calls from there largely stopped.

"At the end of the day, do you want to be enemies with your neighbors over ducks?" posed Kimberly Rathbun, whose husband is president of the West Oaks HOA. She asked her mail carrier to stop feeding them, she said, but didn't want to ruffle feathers.

On a cold Wednesday, four ducks loltered near Batcheller's house. One preened its belly. A second pattered around the curb. A third sat. All looked oblivious to the drama in the neighborhood.

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SHALE

From page A1

dental Petroleum, the top producer in West Texas' Permian Basin oil field, plans to cut its 2020 capital spending by a whopping 40 percent from the combined 2019 spending of Oxy and Anadarko Petroleum, which Oxy recently acquired in a deal that



Denver-based Centennial Resource Development, believes that forecast is optimistic. He estimates that production will grow by only 400,000 barrels a day next year, in part because the best shale acreage is getting drained of oil and leaving less bountiful regions to be drilled.

Scott Sheffield, the CEO of Permian producer Pioneer Natural Resources, largely agrees. He

boosted its debt to \$40 billion. Occidental is also offering buyouts to an undisclosed number of employees as it seeks to consolidate operations and squeeze savings from the merger.

Another of the Permian's biggest players, Midland's Concho Resources, said it has "course-corrected" after it drilled wells too closely together, resulting in poor production and undermining the company's reputation as an efficient Permian-centric producer. Now, Concho is spacing its wells farther apart and drilling fewer of them.

Houston's Apache Corp., meanwhile, said it plans to cut its 2020 spending by up to 20 percent while also completing a centralizing and job-cutting plan — likely eliminating more regional and midlevel leadership roles to save another \$150 million per year.

"Investors are frustrated with excessive capital investment by U.S. producers," said Apache Chief Executive John Christmann in his earnings call. "For these and other reasons, the broad energy sector is out of favor and there is very little investor interest in publicly traded E&P companies."

Creating 'a lot of distress'

The pullback in capital spending, however, hasn't yet won investors back. The S&P 500 is up 3 percent in the past 12 months, while its index tracking oil and gas producers has plunged 37 percent.



Caleb Adair, a floorhand from Booneville, Ark., works on a drilling rig near Malaga, N.M. The U.S. shale industry is shrinking to survive amid an environment of depressed crude prices.

Jon Shapley / Staff file photo

Companies need to prove that the recent restraint in spending is a permanent shift in the way they do business, not just another part of the up-and-down cycle of the oil and gas sector, said Matt Portillo, managing director of exploration and production research at Tudor, Pickering, Holt & Co., a Houston investment bank.

"It's actually creating some optimism that we'll have a slowdown and a healthier sector in the longer term," Portillo said. "But, in the short term, it's going to create a lot of distress."

Shale producers have sliced their budgets by about 8 percent this year and should cut 15 percent or so more next year, Portillo said. Part of those reductions is

due to efficiency gains achieved through automation, better seismic imaging and longer horizontal wells. Simply put, companies are producing more oil and gas with fewer drilling rigs and fracking crews.

Nearly half of the nation's fracking horsepower has been temporarily idled or permanently scrapped, according to energy analyst estimates. Even the biggest oil field services companies such as Houston-based Halliburton, which dominates the North American fracking market, are pulling back. Halliburton recently axed 650 jobs as it said it would reduce its spending by \$300 million a year.

Even the nation's biggest ener-

gy company, Exxon Mobil, is cutting back. Exxon, whose 55 drilling rigs in the Permian Basin are more than double those of the next most active driller, has reduced the number of fracking crews it planned to deploy in the basin to 10 from 16.

Slowing oil output

U.S. oil production this year peaked at a record 12.6 million barrels per day, but the growth in output is flattening. The federal government has revised its 2020 growth to below 1 million barrels a day compared with a record 1.6 million barrels added in 2018.

Eagle Ford shale pioneer Mark Papa, who founded Houston's EOG Resources and now leads

also cited the strained finances of many companies that can't afford to increase drilling activity.

"The Permian is going to slow down significantly over the next several years," Sheffield said. "I don't think OPEC has to worry that much more about U.S. shale growth long term."

And yet the Permian, which accounts for more than one-third of the nation's oil output, is better off than other U.S. shale basins, such as the Eagle Ford in South Texas and the Bakken in North Dakota. A prominent Bakken player, Whiting Petroleum, for instance, has seen its stock value fall more than 80 percent since last fall.

For some companies, it may be too late. Shale pioneer Chesapeake Energy, of Oklahoma, recently admitted in a regulatory filing that its future as a going concern is in question as it struggles with a large debt load, looming payment due dates and its stock trading below \$1 per share. The company, analysts said, may have waited too long to shift its focus from cheap natural gas to more valuable crude, a costly delay amplified by Chesapeake's untimely acquisition of Wild Horse Resource Development of Houston last year just as oil prices were falling.

"Bankruptcies are going to likely accelerate in 2020," Portillo said. "It's going to drive further industry consolidation."

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BUSINESS

HOUSTON CHRONICLE • SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 16, 2019 • SECTION B ★★

• DOW: 28,004.89, up 222.93 (+0.8%) | • S&P: 3,120.46, up 23.63 (+0.8%) | • OIL: \$57.72, up 95¢ (+1.7%) | • NATURAL GAS: \$2.69, up 4.1¢ (+1.5%)

Oil industry in Texas still trimming jobs

Sector lost 2,000 last month as economy slows globally; state remains strong overall

By Erin Douglas
STAFF WRITER

Texas energy companies are cutting their workforces amid sluggish growth in the sector, according to jobs data from the Tex-

as Workforce Commission released Friday.

Texas' mining and logging sector, which is dominated by the oil and gas industry, was down 2,000 jobs in October from September. The sector has shed jobs

through much of the second half of 2019.

Other indicators point to a slowdown for Texas oil as well. The number of active oil and gas rigs in the U.S. fell by 11 this week as companies continue to pull rigs from operation because of a slowing global economy that has pressured energy demand and kept oil prices in a slump — for the

Inside

» Buffett's company buys additional stake in Occidental. B4

most part, sitting between \$50 and \$60 per barrel. At the same time, as producers' profits have suffered, investors have lost patience with the shale industry, known for overspending, and

pulled their money out.

The state's overall economy, however, remains healthy. Texas' jobless rate held steady in October at a historic low of 3.4 percent as employers added more than 30,000 jobs. Over the year, the state added about 297,000 jobs, an increase of 2.4 percent.

» October labor market data is Economy continues on B7



Richard Drew / Associated Press

DOW HITS 28K

» Wall Street closes out the week on a high as the Dow, S&P 500 and Nasdaq all set records. Page B3

New CFO, less debt for Swiss oil group

By L.M. Sixel
STAFF WRITER

Weatherford International said it is replacing its chief financial officer as the oil field services firm prepares to emerge from bankruptcy.

Weatherford, a Swiss company that has its principal offices in Houston, said Christoph Bausch stepped down as CFO on Thursday to pursue other opportunities. He will be succeeded by Christian Garcia, who most recently has worked as CFO for Visteon Corp. an automotive cockpit electronics company in Michigan.

Stuart Fraser, the chief accounting officer, will serve as interim CFO until Garcia assumes the job on Jan. 6.

The CFO shuffle comes about two months after bankruptcy court in Houston approved Weatherford's reorganization plan that would slash the company's debt by some \$6 billion and give creditors more than 90 percent of the reorganized company, clearing the way for Weatherford to emerge from bankruptcy over the next several months. Bausch, who joined Weatherford in 2016, testified in favor of the plan during a September bankruptcy hearing.

Weatherford was once considered among the Big Four oil field services companies along with Schlumberger and the Houston companies Halliburton and Baker Hughes. The company has struggled financially for years, selling off assets in recent years as it tried to stay afloat before filing for Chapter 11 bankruptcy pro-

RETAIL



John Carl D'Annunzio / Albany Times Union

Some experts point to Aldi as a potential model as Amazon prepares to set up a new grocery store chain.

Getting ready for Amazon grocery

By Benjamin Romano
SEATTLE TIMES

As Amazon readies its grocery chain, analysts and competitors are trying to predict how the commerce giant will make what many expect to be a major move

Experts speculate on how commerce giant will enter ring



Outside, delivery drivers wait to ferry grocery orders to nearby homes, while other customers drive up to collect their shopping.

That's one industry specialist's vision for Amazon's possible approach. It's an idea already under devel-

tection this summer.

Garcia has more than three decades of financial experience, holding leadership roles in several industries including oil field services, automotive electronics and software and consulting. Weatherford, meanwhile, has reported losses in 19 consecutive quarters, most recently an \$82 million loss in the second quarter of this year.

Sergio Chapa contributed.

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Into the biggest category of retail spending.

Picture a grocery store with a miniature version of a highly automated fulfillment center on an upper floor. Robots whiz between tall, narrow shelves, plucking canned goods and boxes of cereal ordered by customers shopping online or in the wide aisles of the fresh market on the floor below.



Alert Innovation/TNS

Alert Innovation bots that automate the selection of canned and boxed goods could be a blueprint for Amazon.

opment by Boston-based Alert Innovation — which has a crucial piece of it, the robots, in use at a Walmart store.

Or perhaps Amazon's new grocery chain will look more like that of German discount grocer Lidl, which takes a no-frills approach, providing low prices and rotating a selection of discounted general merchandise.

Grocery continues on B7

Elliman lauds Houston's luxury condo market

By Nancy Sarnoff
STAFF WRITER

The top brass from luxury real estate brokerage Douglas Elliman gushed over Houston's burgeoning high-rise condominium market this week, highlighting Texas as a destination for the country's wealthiest individuals.

"I wish I was as bullish on New York and L.A. as I am on Florida and Texas," Howard Lorber, executive chairman of New York-based Douglas Elliman, said at an event celebrating the company's entrance into the Houston market. "People are migrating from high-tax states to low-tax or no-tax states."

Individuals from the East

Coast, he said, are heading to Florida, while those on the West Coast are moving to Texas.

"That's why we're here," Lorber said Wednesday night at the posh Post Oak Hotel near the Galleria.

Elliman in August announced it had formed a joint venture with Houston-based Sudhoff Cos., which specializes in selling new condominiums in some of Houston's most affluent neighborhoods. Sudhoff, formed in Houston in 2010, is now operating under the Elliman umbrella.

Executives dropped in for the Houston event — some for less than 24 hours — which also included a summary of the Wealth Report, an annual publication

Elliman continues on B7



Leslie Plaza Johnson / Contributor

Paddy Dring, global head of prime sales at Knight Frank, gives opening remarks during a panel at the Post Oak Hotel.

Group finds a loophole in real estate pocket rule

By Nancy Sarnoff
and R.A. Schuetz
STAFF WRITERS

This week's decision by the National Association of Realtors to limit so-called pocket listings — the practice of privately shopping properties without putting them on a centralized listing service — has a major loophole that will limit its benefits to the public, a Washington consumer group said.

The Consumer Federation of America said agents are still allowed to market new listings within their own firm before putting them on a local Multiple Listing Service through what are called "office exclusives." Agents will also have a smaller loophole: they can request waivers

allowing a particular listing to be marketed as a pocket listing.

Even for properties clearly covered by the ban, questions remain.

"Who and how is it going to be enforced?" asked local broker Chance Brown of CB&A, Realtors. Local Multiple Listing Services, such as the Houston Association of Realtors, will have until March 1 to decide how to implement the new policy.

"Allowing agents to privately market new home listings to other individual agents does not serve the interests of either the seller or buyer," Stephen Brobeck, a senior fellow at the Consumer Federation and author of an analysis on pocket listings, said in a statement. "Sellers may

Realtors continues on B7

BUSINESS

GROCERY

From page B4

dise that gives customers a reason to come back regularly in search of deals.

The company on Monday confirmed its first standalone grocery store will open next year in suburban Los Angeles. Earlier reports suggest the company has signed leases for more than a dozen other stores, and many industry watchers expect the company to open perhaps a thousand stores across the country in the coming decade. Amazon's own job listings seek people to lead large-scale programs to support stores offering a "unique customer experience."

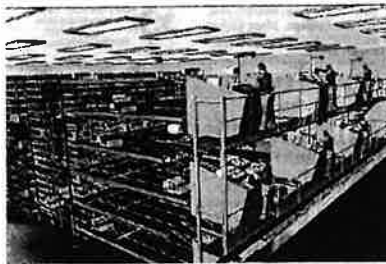
But just what that experience will be, Amazon isn't saying. A company spokesperson said the new grocery store will have a conventional checkout experience, and is neither a version of the natural and organic Whole Foods chain nor an Amazon Go, the convenience stores that use sensor technology to track customer purchases so they

don't have to wait in line to pay.

John Lert, co-founder and CEO of Alert Innovation, said his company's "Novastore" concept, which it's developing independent of the robotics work with Walmart, would revolutionize the grocery business, letting customers peruse the fresh foods and produce, while automated systems quickly gather together the packaged foods on their grocery list and fulfill online orders.

A crucial piece of the system is the company's Alphabet, a small robot that would move among the shelves in the store's micro fulfillment center. Walmart began using these robots earlier this year in its own micro fulfillment center for online orders added to the side of a store in Salem, N.H. The big box retail giant is using other robotic systems for cleaning floors and unloading merchandise at other stores, including in Washington.

Walmart and Amazon and other competitors in mass-market grocery are putting together other pieces of a multi-channel gro-



Alert Innovation / Tribune News Service
Alert Innovation's Novastore concept includes a "micro fulfillment center."

cery strategy using existing stores where employees or gig-economy workers go through picking up orders for online customers.

The automation piece is the hardest part, Lert said. The systems have to be cheap and compact enough to install in hundreds or thousands of stores, but also fast and reliable enough to gather items before customers finish selecting their fresh foods in the market below.

"There's never been an automation application that can touch this in terms of complexity and chal-

lenge," said Lert, who began working on grocery store automation in 1994.

He said his company could have a working prototype of the Novastore concept in two to four years.

If anyone else is poised to do it, it's Amazon, he said, pointing to its network of increasingly automated large-scale fulfillment centers that use robotics technology first developed by Kiva Systems, which Amazon acquired in 2012.

"How far they've gotten with solving the automation problem, I don't know," Lert said, adding, "when

they figure it out, they're going to build a lot of stores."

Amazon's existing logistics prowess coupled with the opportunity to build grocery stores in this way from the ground up could give it a huge potential advantage as it vies for a bigger share of the trillion-dollar-plus grocery category. This kind of store-level automation would also extend the company's fresh foods supply chain much closer to the end customer, facilitating faster grocery delivery.

Lert said he expects the total cost of developing and operating an automated, multi-channel grocery store to be lower than that of today's traditional stores, because they would require less land, parking and human labor, meaning they could sell groceries for lower prices.

But no one expects Amazon to limit itself to grocery sales.

Mike Trafton, a retired grocery executive from Boise, Idaho, sees another model for Amazon in German discount chain Lidl. He's been living in Europe for a year, staying at

Airbnbs and shopping exclusively at Lidl stores.

"Lidl and Aldi" — another discount European grocery chain — "sell huge amounts of general merchandise, appliances, clothing, tools, just stuff that they buy on deals. The customers flock to their stores daily because if you don't buy it, it's gone," Trafton said via e-mail.

Amazon, he said, could do something similar. Moreover, the company's world-leading inventory management systems could help manage out-of-stock items and shrinkage (shoplifting and employee theft), which are "a huge problem in the grocery business," he said.

Amazon's long-rumored grocery store plans were confirmed in job postings for a single Woodland Hills, Calif., store. In recent months, the company has also posted several other positions related to its launch of "a new Amazon grocery store." Language in the job listings point to Amazon's ambition to create a large-scale chain of grocery stores with a "unique customer experience."

ECONOMY

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great news for Texas workers," said Julian Alvarez, the TWC commissioner representing labor. "Their skills continue to be in high demand."

8,000 jobs added here

In the Houston region, employers added 8,000 jobs from September, according to the TWC. Over the year, the local economy has added 80,600 jobs, a growth of 2.6 percent.

The local unemployment rate was 3.5 percent.

The energy slowdown hasn't appeared to have reached the office towers of Houston yet. Employment in oil and gas extraction grew by 2,900 jobs, or about 8 percent, over the year. But some experts are skeptical that the pace will stay positive much longer.

"The jobs in the Permian are going to go first, but at some point that's going to

temper hiring here," said Parker Harvey, an economist at Workforce Solutions. "How many additional lawyers, accountants and engineers do you really need (in Houston) when oil is in such a tight range?"

Other sectors stayed on trend. The local retail sector continued to decline, shedding 3,000 jobs since the same time last year. Retailers have been squeezed around the nation by online giants such as Amazon, which are able to slash product prices and undercut traditional brick-and-mortar companies.

The health and educational services sector continued to grow, adding 10,100 jobs over the year. Manufacturing added 9,100 jobs and trade, transportation and utilities added 4,000.

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ELLIMAN

From page B4

featuring international property data, luxury spending research and global wealth trends.

Despite a darkening economic outlook, the global population of individuals with an ultrahigh net worth is expected to increase by 22 percent by 2023, adding 43,000 more people to the ranks of those worth more than \$30

early next year.

To be sure, Elliman's foray into Houston gives another boost to the city's luxury real estate market, particularly in the high-end condo segment.

"There's tremendous opportunity here in Texas to build more luxury housing," Susan De França, president and CEO of development marketing for Elliman, said during the Wednesday event. "And the clientele today has become much more discern-

LIFE TRIBUTES

Burtch, Michael
Cohen, Jacob

Leeka, Jack

Leissner, John

Lillich, Ralph Jr.

MICHAEL E. BURTCH

1951-2019

HOUSTON: Michael E. Burtch age 68 died Friday, November 8, 2019.

He was formerly employed by Lutheran Christian Book Store in Houston.

He is survived by his wife, Mary A. (Reichenbach); 2 children: Michael E. (Kora) II and Jasmin (Nehemiah) Nulton; five siblings; and three grandchildren.

He is preceded in death by his parents, Karl and Joan Burtch.

Funeral services will be conducted 11 AM Monday,

November 18 at St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church, Paulding, Ohio. Burial will follow in Wiltzie Cemetery, Payne, Ohio.

Visitation will be 2 - 6 PM Sunday, November 17 at Den Herder Funeral Home, Paulding, Ohio.

In lieu of flowers, the family suggests donations made to Alzheimer's Association or St. Paul Evangelical Lutheran Church.

Online condolences may be sent to www.denherderfh.com

JACOB MARVIN COHEN

1926-2019

Jacob Marvin Cohen passed away on November 13th, two days following his 93rd birthday. Jacob was a native Houstonian and the youngest son of Meyer and Ida Cohen. He enlisted in the Army during World War II and, later, obtained an undergraduate degree at The University of Houston and an O.D. at the Southern College of Optometry. He raised a family with his wife Jennie and enjoyed a successful optometry practice in downtown Houston for over 50 years. He was an active member of the Masonic Order, American Optometric Association, Texas Optometric Association, Harris County Optical Society, and was appointed by Governor Houston Smith as The Texas



and Gine Fleishman, Jill Fleishman and Robin Kornblum, and Bruce Fleishman. He will also be remembered fondly by his grandchildren and great-grandchildren; Joshua, Jessica, Oliver and Edie Bea Grimm, Shawn and Caryn Mackoff, Corey Powell, and Zachary Fleishman.

A private graveside ceremony will precede a Memorial Service and dinner

JOHN LEISSNER

1961-2019



John Leissner passed away on Sunday, November 3rd in Houston, Texas at the age of 58. John graduated from New Braunfels High School in 1979 and Baylor University in 1984. At Baylor, he was a Member of Beta Theta Pi Fraternity. He is a member of the First Protestant Church in New Braunfels.



John is survive by his parents Carol & Layton Leissner of New Braunfels, sister Lisa Callahan and husband David and nephew Zach Callahan, all of Fredericksburg.

A graveside service will be held on Monday, November 18th at 11:00 am at Comal Cemetery in New Braunfels.

RALPH ALBERT LILLICH JR.

1940-2019

Ralph Albert Lillich Jr., age 78, passed away on Friday, November 15, 2019, two days shy of his 79th birthday. He was born to Ralph Albert Lillich Senior and Virginia Ann Fitzgerald Lillich on November 17, 1940, and grew up with his older sister, Barbara DeAliza. Born and raised a Houstonian, Ralph graduated from Reagan High School in January 1959, where he met the love of his life and wife of 60 years, Alexandria (Sandra)



Texas; daughter, Suzanne Davis of Spring, Texas; son, Greg Lillich and his wife Kim of Lindale, Texas; and grandchildren, Justin Lillich,

million, according to the report, published by Elliman and London-based property consulting firm Knight Frank.

"Property is the beneficiary," said Paddy Dring, Knight Frank's global head of prime sales.

Through the Sudhoff deal, Elliman now represents some \$500 million in local development projects, including the Hawthorne, the Giorgetti and the River Oaks. Jacob Sudhoff, now CEO of Douglas Elliman, Texas, said he planned to expand with offices in Dallas and Austin

ing. They want higher-end finishes, more luxurious amenities and unparalleled services."

While high-rise living is relatively new to this area, it's appeal has grown in recent years; in part a result of some of Houston's flaws.

"Flooding, traffic - it all helps us sell more condos," Sudhoff said. "We're appealing to that demographic that want to have that lock-and-leave and don't have to have to worry about their homes."

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REALTORS

From page B1

miss out on opportunities to sell for a higher price and buyers are limited in their selection of properties."

The national association's 800-person board overwhelmingly voted Monday to limit the use of pocket listings by requiring agents who sell through Multiple Listing Services to submit their listings to the MLS within one business day of marketing the property to the public, whether that's with a sign in the yard, an email blast or a Facebook

post.

In its analysis, the Federation said pocket listings are anti-consumer and threaten a non-discriminatory housing market. The push for pocket listings, it said, comes largely from agents who want to reduce the time and expense of marketing a property without a reduction in their commission.

"Agents who pocket list are effectively gaming the system - restricting access to their listings but retaining access to the listings of other agents," the report said.

The rule goes into effect Jan. 1, 2020.

Optometry Board where he served as Vice Chairman. He also served as an Adjunct Professor of Clinical Optometry at The University of Houston.

He was preceded in death by his wife, Jennie and his brother, Gerson. He is survived by his wife, Maralyn Sondra Cohen, children and step-children; Gary and Rebecca Cohen, Martin and Sharon Grimm, Marc Cohen and Dennis Watson, Gregg

JACK KEITH LEEKA

1936-2019

Jack Keith Leeka passed away November 7, 2019 after a brave struggle with Parkinson's Disease.

Jack was born in Springfield Missouri on September 27, 1936 but grew up in Joplin Missouri where he graduated Joplin High School. Jack attended Southern Methodist University where he was a member of the Sigma Alpha Epsilon fraternity. While at SMU, Jack met his future wife Elizabeth (Betty) Houston Smallwood who had been visiting a friend for the weekend. Jack and Betty were then married May 9, 1959. After graduating SMU, Jack attended the University of Texas Law School and graduated in the spring of 1963. Jack then moved to Houston and worked as an attorney for almost 50 years. Skiing was Jack's most fulfilling hobby and he felt happiest when skiing down the slopes at Vail. Jack will be remembered by his children Elizabeth Leeka

on Sunday, November 17th at 4:30PM at the St. James Highrise (5555 Del Monte, Houston, Texas 77056) in the Marlborough Room. Donations in Jacob's memory can be made to Houston's Jewish Family Service or to the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center.

Houston Jewish Funerals
5435 Dabrowski, Suite 27421
HOUSTON, TEXAS 77055
713.866.5257
HoustonJewishFunerals.com



Albert and Jack Keith Leeka Jr., grandchildren Nicholas Albert and Jack Albert and many nieces, nephews and friends. Jack was predeceased by his wife of 59 years Elizabeth Smallwood Leeka as well as parents George I Leeka and Velta Fay Leeka and sister Georgine Ruth Jones.

The family would like to thank the staff at Heartis as well as his caregiver Peggy Evans.

A Celebration of Life Service will be held in memory of Jack on Friday November 22nd at 1:00 PM at Ascension Episcopal Church, 2525 Seagler Road, Houston TX 77042 (713) 781-1590

Rogers Lillich. Ralph was preceded in death by his parents and grandson, Cash Davis. Ralph and Sandra were married on June 11, 1959, just five months after their high school graduation and began a family of their own the following year. Following high school, Ralph earned a Real Estate degree from Houston Community College. He was a Charter member of St. Matthew United Methodist Church. He spent his career in the oil and gas industry and ultimately started his own business, Ralco Specialties, Inc. In his free time, he was an active sportsman who enjoyed hunting and fishing whenever he could. Ralph is survived by his wife, Sandra Lillich; son, Ralph the 3rd (Trey) Lillich and his wife Kim of Houston,

Jordan Lillich, Jackson Lillich, Lexy Davis, Cody Lillich, and Savannah Lillich. Great grandchildren Rush Lillich, Layla Lillich, Jonathan Lillich, Cheyanne Lillich, Beau Lillich, Layne Lillich, Emma Lillich and Trevor Lillich. Pallbearers will be Justin Lillich, Jordan Lillich, Jackson Lillich, Cody Lillich, Paul Bircher and Evan Bircher. Services will be at Woodlawn Funeral Home, 1101 Antoine, Houston TX. Visitation on Sunday November 17, 2019, from 1:00 pm - 4:00 pm, and the funeral service on Monday November 18, 2019 at 1:00 pm. Interment to follow at Woodlawn Garden of Memories.

Woodlawn
FUNERAL HOME & CEMETERY

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condolences at
chron.com/tributes

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