I want to say that I am very thankful to have been reelected to another term in office. My first term was challenging, but busy and exciting. Public service is not always easy, but it is something that I care about deeply and will continue to focus my attention 100 percent of the time.

As I have another four-year term to look forward to, I plan on working harder on the issues most important to my constituents and our community. Those include expanding access to healthcare through our hospital district, which is opening new clinics throughout the community.

Part of that effort also includes working even closer with our Children’s Hospital. As part of that, UMC and Children’s Hospital are making gains to establish relationships with doctors in the community to encourage them to refer patients to Children’s Hospital.

I’m also excited to continue work on economic development. Since taking office, I have been a proponent of downtown redevelopment efforts, supporting business project incentives in El Paso’s downtown area.

I also intend on continuing to be a proponent of expanding heritage tourism and preserving our historic places and neighborhoods throughout the County. I believe that if we can’t save and preserve our historic treasures, then we will certainly have a hard time preserving and selling our community’s values to investors and those who decide to move here.

During my next term, I also aim to better our relationship with our counterparts in Mexico and get back to working together on important issues that we deal with here on the border.

As an elected official, I am always at the service of the public and our community. If you ever have any issues or need anything, my door is always open and my staff and I are always prepared to help.
Earlier this year, the El Paso County Commissioners Court participated in a strategic planning workshop session where we discussed several goals for 2018. Every year, the Court participates in a two day workshop that allows us to talk about the successes and challenges of the previous year, and work towards identifying several new priorities for the new year.

Some of the priorities included establishing a stronger relationship with our counterparts at the City of El Paso—as well as the City of Juarez. Increased teamwork will allow us to address issues that impact our residents at both the City and County level such as access to public libraries, illegal dumping, storm water mitigation and binational affairs.

This also aligns with some of the priorities in my office, and I am eager to see what sort of collaboration we can accomplish with our fellow leaders because I know that stronger communication between all levels of government, on both sides of the border, can only benefit our region. I am hoping we will find ways we can tap into our strengths as a region and solve some of the challenges that our community faces.

A couple of other projects that I proposed during strategic planning included a market analysis of the El Paso economy and food policy incentives. The market analysis will allow us to study the buying power of El Paso's Mexican visitors in business sectors such as retail, entertainment, and other goods and services. I believe once we have this information, it will assist us in attracting bigger businesses and companies to the region.

The food policy incentives are also a project that my office has been researching and discussing with the Paso del Norte Institute for Healthy Living. This project will be explored throughout the upcoming budget cycle to see if we can set aside funds to implement a Healthy Food Financing Initiative.

Similar initiatives have been successfully incorporated in other communities and have provided grocery stores the financial incentive and opportunity to expand or create new stores in food insecure neighborhoods. Due to the high rate of food insecurity in our community, it is imperative that we implement policies that will allow access to healthy foods and eradicate hunger and diseases related to unhealthy diets.
Ascarate Park Updates

Fish Stocking

Recently, the County, through Texas Parks and Wildlife, filled the Ascarate Lake with two stockings of rainbow trout. As a result, the lake was closed briefly to allow the fish to acclimate to the new environment.

There was winter trout stocking in March at Ascarate Lake too and there is a planned stocking of 2,000 catfish during the second week of May.

Ascarate Park is one of our community’s most important family assets and I have work really hard with our Parks and Public Works staff to ensure that the park has improvements and things to offer.

We have a vibrant fishing community that uses the park every day to fish, and making sure the lake is sufficiently stocked is very important to me and the County.

Little Libraries

Recently, during Commissioners Court, we approved the authorization to accept the contribution of four Little Free Libraries at Ascarate Park.

Little Libraries are small structures that hold books. Community members can take them as they please and leave books there for others. I think that as we consider improvements to the community and to the park, we should take into consideration literacy. And this project does just that.

This project was led by the Parks Department and the County’s Juvenile Probation Department for the annual Global Youth Service Day event which was held in late April. Youth in JPD, along with those from the community, helped build the libraries.

Global Youth Service Day is an opportunity for our young folks to engage in projects that build life skills and provide a service to our community.
New boat

On April 9, the Commissioners Court approved the purchase of an Aquatic Vegetation Removal Workboat for Ascarate Park. The $73,000 investment is one that I supported as this new boat will help keep the lake at Ascarate Park clean. In the past, the park lake has been negatively affected by the spread of golden algae, which severely impacted the fish.

This new boat will help maintain the lake and address some of the issues with the spread of golden algae. We are expecting the boat to arrive sometime in mid-May. This purchase is just another example of our commitment to continuing to invest in Ascarate Park and keeping it a family friendly community center.

County hires new Parks Director

Veronica Myers is excited to join the County of El Paso as the new Parks and Recreation Director. She has 20 years of Parks and Recreation experience with 15 years in a professional/managerial position at the City of El Paso Parks and Recreation Department. Mrs. Myers has managed recreation facilities, special events, leisure services, adult and youth sports, outdoor recreation, after school programs and summer camps. She has 32 years of experience in providing excellent customer service to the residents of El Paso. She holds a Bachelors of Business Administration degree from UTEP and is Certified by the National Recreation and Parks Association (NRPA) as a Parks and Recreation Professional (CPRP). She looks forward to improving the Quality of Life for County constituents.
Recently, University Medical Center (UMC) received their Comprehensive Stroke Center certification. This is a huge win for our community and our hospital because it will contribute to the overall well being of our community. As the only Comprehensive Stroke Center in all of West Texas – the closest similar centers are in Phoenix and San Antonio – El Paso residents can now receive the care they need for the most complex neurological cases, right here at home.

As a Certified Comprehensive Stroke Center, UMC’s team specializes in life-saving stroke care and works in a timely manner to diagnose, treat and provide early rehabilitation to stroke patients. Team members include neurointerventionalists, neurologist, neurosurgeons, emergency medicine physicians and specially trained nursing staff.

UMC’s Rehabilitation Department also plays an important role in stroke recovery, providing therapy services such as physical therapy, speech therapy and occupational therapy to stroke patients. These services are initiated early on to start the recovery process.

With a team of experts, a comprehensive system for rapid diagnosis and treatment and state-of-the-art equipment UMC will be able to provide life-saving stroke care to the El Paso community and residents of the region.

Additionally, UMC is the first and only hospital in El Paso to have 24/7 neurointervention, stroke, neurocritical care and neurology coverage. The Neurology program is rapidly growing and committed to providing life-saving care to victims of stroke.

Thank you to UMC’s CEO, Jacob Cintron, and your team for all of the great work that led to this certification—and all of the great work you all will continue to do to treat our community!
COMPREHENSIVE STROKE DESIGNATION IS THE HIGHEST LEVEL OF STROKE CARE AVAILABLE.

BEFORE NOW, THE CLOSEST COMPREHENSIVE STROKE CENTER WAS NEARLY 500 MILES AWAY.
On Monday, March 26, 2018, the Commissioners Court approved revisions to the County of El Paso’s Anti-Harassment Policy. These changes will allow the Human Resources Department to expedite their service delivery when it comes to employment investigations pertaining to claims of workplace harassment, and will further help to maximize the safety and protection of our employees.

Now, more than ever, in light of the recent #MeToo movement, it was especially important for the County to take a hard look at our own Anti-Harassment Policies and make sure we were taking these matters seriously by strengthening our policies and procedures.

Updated areas of the policy now allows for investigations to be handled by an external provider. The process by which the external provider shall use is clearly outlined in the new policy. The previous policy required employees, both supervisory and nonsupervisory, to complete this training upon hire and every two years thereafter during the course of their employment in an online or in person training capacity.

To be most effective, the updated policy requires employees to complete these trainings upon hire and every one year thereafter. Further, employees in a supervisory role will now be required to attend the training in person each time their training requirement is due and it will not allow for supervisors to take this critical training in an online capacity. Non-supervisory employees, however, shall be able to utilize both training methods so long as they are rotated each time the training requirement is due. This will ensure a thorough understanding of the policy at all levels of employment within the County.

I am glad to see that these policies have been updated in order to prevent any potential issues that our employees may face in the workforce and it makes our County a much safer environment.
Earlier this year, the County Commissioners Court authorized the County’s participation in the El Paso Community Collaborative’s submission of a grant to the Mental Health Grant Program for Justice-Involved Individuals as directed by Senate Bill 292.

Senate Bill 292 created the Mental Health Grant Program for Justice-Involved Individuals to reduce recidivism rates, arrests, and incarceration among individuals with mental illness, and reduce the wait time for forensic commitments.

Recently, we learned that Emergence Health Network and El Paso County were selected to receive up to $12.5m in funding through SB 292, to establish, continue, or expand programs to help people with mental illness receive services and support needed to address mental health issues outside of the criminal justice system and reduce wait time for people committed to a state hospital. In this case, it will be used for the Crisis Intervention Training Program for the El Paso Police Department.

I’m very excited for the County’s participation in this collaborative effort because it will save many lives and deter many people away from the jail, in order to help them find the care that they truly need and deserve.
Each year the South By Southwest or SXSW Conference is held in Austin and it brings leaders from all over the world together to discuss a range of items, including government, health, technology, film, and music. This year, in early March, I joined colleagues from the County, City, UTEP, the Borderplex Alliance and others to attend in an effort to help market the El Paso region as a place to do business and invest.

During my time in Austin, I was able to attend important conferences and panel discussions regarding governance, planning, healthcare, and food policy, all of which are important fields in our community. It was a great opportunity to listen to and learn from community leaders throughout the country and from around the world to discuss their struggles and achievements when it comes to those issues.

This conference is a great opportunity for local leaders to attend in order to meet brilliant thinkers who work every day to make improvements and achieve public goals. The networking opportunity cannot be overstated as this event brings many minds together.

Discussions on neighborhood revitalization, culture, health equity, and economic growth were well worth the time and effort to attend, and those discussions and points of view will be helpful as I work within our community and region with our partners to improve our services and quality of life.
As you may be aware, I was successful in having the Commissioners Court approve a historic architectural resources survey. The survey portion of the plan has been complete, with more than 1,000 historic structures being recognized and the call for a national historic district.

Creating the national district is the second phase of the project, which I am excited to see realized. Unfortunately, the City has an ordinance that makes it difficult for us to move forward on this part of the project. We’re told that City staff is prepared to work with us on changing the ordinance so that we can continue moving forward on the project.

However, the Commissioners Court took up an item recently seeking to postpone services with our survey experts until the City makes the necessary changes.

I think we need to be very careful about putting an open ended date on it. I worry that the City may kick the can down the road forever. As County leaders, we need to decide when enough is enough and when to move forward on this important preservation and economic development project.

Ultimately, the Court voted to postpone services with our firm until the City takes action. I was the only “No” vote on the item because it is in our community’s interest to have this project completed as quickly as possible. While this project remains on hold, I will continue to work with our staff and the City to help get this back on track and so we can accomplish what we set out to do. Please continue to check back with my office and these newsletters for additional updates as we move along.
On April 1, I published an opinion column in the El Paso Times to discuss the relationship between Texas state leadership and local government. During the last few state legislative sessions, many state leaders have tried to undercut local counties and municipalities, and as we prepare for the next session in 2019, I thought this was the proper time to gear up and make some points about local control. Please read the column that was published below:

It has long been a saying that “everything is bigger in Texas,” from our vast open views, our mountain ranges, our love of culture, and our determination to make life better for our friends and neighbors. Unfortunately, another thing that is big in Texas is a growing rift between those in state leadership and those in local government.

For at least the past two state legislative sessions, there has been a fierce movement by state leaders to propose legislation that would chip away at local control. And for those legislative sessions, local elected officials from counties and cities, including myself, have trekked to the state capitol to testify and speak up against such harmful overtures.

Our state leaders, who for many years have criticized the federal government for what they considered overreach into state affairs, are guilty of just that when it comes to local communities setting their own priorities. Of the issues that come to mind, one is in the form of Senate Bill 4, the state’s anti-immigrant legislation which worked to turn local police officers into federal immigration agents. Yet another harmful attempt by the state was the proposal of Senate Bill 6, an ugly attempt to discriminate against transgender Texans, one of the most vulnerable groups in our state. This bill would have placed restrictions on which bathrooms transgender Texans could use.

Perhaps the largest battle regarding state versus local control deals with unfunded mandates and the state’s attempt to limit counties’ and cities’ abilities to raise revenue.

Counties across the state – including El Paso County – are already overburdened by unfunded mandates set by the State Legislature. In Fiscal Year 2017, El Paso County assumed about $186 million in unfunded mandatory core services and an additional $20 million in support services, for a total encumbrance of $206 million.

And that figure represents more than half of El Paso County’s budget. Our resources are very limited, with 75 to 80 percent of our budget funded by local property and sales taxes. Counties do not have the same flexibility that municipalities have in creating fees to help fund services. But despite that, El Paso County has remained a good steward of local tax dollars, adopting the same tax rate for three years in a row.

However, every session the state legislature continues to send down unfunded mandates while aiming to usurp more local control by limiting our ability to pay for those mandates as well as the growth many of our counties are seeing.
They, disingenuously, are trying to blame and punish cities and counties for higher property taxes but to be honest, the reason why property taxes remain so high in Texas is because the state has dramatically cut public education funding, leaving local school districts to pick up the tab for our growing education costs. More than 50 percent of what we pay in property taxes goes to public schools, but it wasn’t always that way. If you go back to 2008, the state and local school districts covered 45 percent of education funding each, with the federal government paying for the remaining 10 percent. Fast forward to 2015 and the state’s contribution decreased to 39 percent, which pushed the local contribution above 50 percent.

According to the Texas Comptroller of Public Accounts, in 2015, the student enrollment in Texas was 4.8 million, with 2019 projected enrollment to reach 5.1 million. If the state fails to ensure funding for schools, local property tax rates will continue to rise.

In the past, our County has been one of the strongest voices in taking this battle to the state legislature and working to protect counties from further damage. My office and I will continue to do so. As our community and the state prepare for the next state legislative session, I believe the time is ripe for our state leaders to listen more closely to local officials about the issues, struggles, and challenges we face. We need to preserve local decision making and allow local communities, like ours, to lead the way.

**Stout in the News**

- Unen fuerzas Chihuahua, Texas y Nuevo México, El Diario, (4-20-18)
- Move over chicken wire, El Paso County buys $73K boat to rid Ascarate Lake of algae, El Paso Times (4-10-18)
- Lewis says he is not ready to concede precinct 2 commissioners court race, KVIA, (3-7-18)
- Cook, Samaniego solid choices for county judge seat; Stout earns endorsement, El Paso Times (2-19-2018)
- Rematch set for El Paso County commissioner, El Paso Times (2-15-2018)
- City, county partner to attend popular SXSW fest in Austin, El Paso Times, (1-9-18)
Precinct 2 Resolutions

Black History Month

On February 5, the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court officially recognized the month of February as “Black History Month in El Paso County.” The month recognizes and celebrates the wide range of achievements African Americans have contributed throughout American History. El Paso County is a multicultural, inclusive community that will continuously encourage residents of all backgrounds to achieve their potential and celebrate each residents’ personal and professional achievements—not only during one designated month of the year—but year-round.

Resolution to recognize and welcome Representative Barbara Gervin-Hawkins to El Paso County

The Black El Paso Democrats, founded in 1982, has served as a pinnacle organization throughout El Paso County which encourages African Americans as well as other people of color to become engaged and active in civil discourse and the democratic process. On February 17, 2017, this esteemed organization of community members hosted its 35th Political Awareness and Awards Banquet to recognize community leaders and activists. Its guest speaker, Representative Barbara Gervin-Hawkins of the 120th Texas House District, which covers parts of San Antonio and Converse, has been a community leader since the 1980s. She is a passionate educator and businesswoman who serves as the Special Projects Coordinator of the George Gervin Youth Center and is co-founder of the Gervin Academy which serves more than 1,500 students.

As a result of this longstanding commitment to community service and her continuing efforts to improve the lives of those in her community that the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court recognized and welcomed Representative Barbara Gervin-Hawkins to El Paso County on February of 2018.

El Paso Children’s Hospital Birthday Month

Of the 5,750 hospitals in the United States, fewer than 250 specialize in pediatrics. El Paso Children’s Hospital (EPCH) provides the highest level of pediatric care in West Texas. The El Paso community began calling for a dedicated children’s hospital 30 years ago. That dream came to fruition on February 14, 2012, in the form of a 225,000 square feet facility designed exclusively for pediatric healthcare. EPCH elevates the quality and scope of medical care in the El Paso region by providing unmatched excellence in specialized pediatric patient care, as well as research and education opportunities. That is why on February 12, the Commissioners Court recognized that February 2018 be known as “El Paso Children’s Hospital Birthday Month.”
Dancing Backwards in High Heels Day - A Celebration of Women Entrepreneurship

In an effort to celebrate and recognize the enormous contributions and incredible accomplishments of women and women entrepreneurs from across the globe, the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court have resolved that May 8, 2018 be known as “Dancing Backwards in High Heels Day - A Celebration of Women Entrepreneurship.” The County of El Paso, alongside the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, and the Women’s Business Border Center recognize the immense contributions made every day by the women owned businesses of the region, the dedication, and sweat equity they provide every day to ensure that El Paso is a thriving metroplex.

El Paso Children’s Hospital Nutrition Awareness Month

On March 5, the Commissioners Court recognized that March 2018 be recognized as “El Paso Children’s Hospital Nutrition Awareness Month.” Every day, the staff of El Paso Children’s Hospital (EPCH) work to provide the best family centered care in El Paso. El Paso Children’s Hospital is currently the only hospital in the city that has Registered Dietitians that are Board Certified Specialists in Pediatric Nutrition and the only Diabetes Education Service dedicated exclusively to the pediatric population. It is because of this multi-specialty environment that the children of El Paso can receive the best care, research, and protocols right here at home.

Janus v. AFSCME Supreme Court Case

This year, the Supreme Court is considering the case Janus v. AFSCME Council 31 which may decide whether those who work in the public service -- such as nurses, teachers and firefighters -- would be denied the freedom to come together in strong unions. An unfavorable decision in this case threatens to undermine the freedom of millions of working people, especially women and communities of color to join together in strong unions. In response to this threat, the El Paso County Judge and Commissioners Court recognize the freedom of all employees to exercise their rights to a voice and dignity on the job through joining together in strong unions. This Commissioners Court urges the Supreme Court to consider the legacy of Dr. King, the Memphis sanitation workers, and the public benefit created by workers organizing in rendering its decision.
Commissioner Stout addresses seniors during a visit to Carolina/Happiness Senior Center

Coronation Ceremony at Grandview Senior Center

County Judge Ruben Vogt, Chief Administrator Betsy Keller and Commissioner Stout at the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce’s Women’s Conference

County Commissioners Court presenting the County Employee Distinguished Service Awards

Texas House Speaker Joe Strauss speaking to leaders of El Paso County

Southwest University announces $1.5 million donation El Paso Children’s Hospital