



CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

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2025 • REGION

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PHOTO BY BRADLEY WILSON

Texas Gov. Greg Abbott

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UNIVERSITY INTERSCHOLASTIC LEAGUE

CURRENT ISSUES & EVENTS

REGION • 2025

- 1. Why did U.S. President Joe Biden say he pardoned his son Hunter, after insisting he would not do so?**
 - a. The charges were politically motivated.
 - b. His successor pardoned his family members.
 - c. He didn't have confidence in the judicial system.
 - d. His son wasn't guilty.
- 2. In February 2025, Texas-based company Intuitive Machines made history when its Odysseus lander pulled off a nail-biting touchdown. On March 2, Blue Ghost, made by another Texas-based company, Firefly Aerospace, was the second privately built vehicle to land where?**
 - a. Venus
 - b. an asteroid between Mars and Jupiter
 - c. the moon
 - d. Mars
- 3. Calling them critical to American national security, U.S. President Donald Trump said he cannot rule out using military or economic force to take over which two?**
 - a. Ukraine and Thailand
 - b. Greenland and the Panama Canal
 - c. Canada and Mexico
 - d. the Gulf of Mexico and the Arctic Sea
- 4. At least a couple dozen people sat in the House gallery wearing red shirts reading "Ban Democratic Chairs." Still, saying he represented all people, not just Republicans, he received 46 Democratic votes and was elected speaker of the Texas House. Who?**
 - a. Rep. Dustin Burrows, R-Lubbock
 - b. Rep. David Cook, R-Mansfield
 - c. Rep. Dade Phelan, R-Baumont
 - d. Rep. Pete Laney, D-Plainview
- 5. While it's Congress, not the Treasury or the Federal Reserve, that authorizes the manufacture of the nation's money, U.S. President Donald Trump ordered Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent to stop producing what?**
 - a. commemorative coins from the inauguration of past presidents
 - b. cents, also known as pennies
 - c. the \$2 bill
 - d. gold coins in denominations of \$2.50 with "in God we trust" embossed on them
- 6. According to her allies, she was "kidnapped" after leaving her hideout to participate in a rally against President Nicolas Maduro. Opposition leader Maria Corina Machado was released after being briefly detained by agents of the authoritarian regime in what country?**
 - a. Venezuela
 - b. Chile
 - c. Singapore
 - d. Nicaragua

7. **Covering 849,000 acres, two monuments, designated as such in January, honor Native American tribes and protect significant landscapes from mining and energy ventures. The Chuckwalla National Monument and the Sattitla Highlands National Monument are both in which state?**
 - a. South Dakota
 - b. Wyoming
 - c. California
 - d. Montana
8. **Far surpassing that of any other country in the past century, China announced that what economic measure reached almost \$1 trillion last year?**
 - a. China's gross domestic product
 - b. China's consumer spending level
 - c. China's spending on home building
 - d. China's trade surplus, when exports exceed imports
9. **Apple said it removed TikTok and other apps, including Lemon8, from its app store. Google removed TikTok from its Play Store. After Congress passed legislation requiring their removal, what company made the apps that were removed?**
 - a. SAP, headquartered in Walldorf, Germany
 - b. SoftBank, headquartered in Minato City, Tokyo, Japan
 - c. ByteDance, headquartered in Beijing, China
 - d. Samsung Electronics, headquartered in Suwon-si, South Korea
10. **The first 10 migrant detainees were housed in a prison complex used for terrorism suspects, and tents were being set up to house as many as 30,000 migrants 7 miles away. Where?**
 - a. a maximum security prison on Alcatraz Island in San Francisco Bay
 - b. U.S. Navy base at Guantánamo Bay
 - c. Eastern State Penitentiary, once the most expensive and famous prison in the world
 - d. the maximum-security Huntsville unit of the Texas State Penitentiary, built in 1848
11. **This fall, the NCAA adopted what method for determining the champion of the Football Bowl Subdivision, the highest level of college football in the U.S.?**
 - a. poll of coaches averaged with poll of sports reporters
 - b. a 12-team College Football Playoff
 - c. a 64-team bracket elimination mirroring basketball
 - d. end-of-season standings
12. **Say hello to the woolly devil. Identified in Big Bend National Park in Texas, the new plant species, *Ovicula biradiata*, as it is formally known, is especially notable for being the simultaneous discovery of a new species and genus. What is it?**
 - a. a juniper
 - b. a prickly pear cactus
 - c. a hedgehog cactus
 - d. a sunflower
13. **According to Merriam-Webster, the word reflected the desire of Americans to better understand the complex state of affairs in our country and around the world. So which word became that company's word of the year for 2024?**
 - a. "Polarization"
 - b. "Manifest"
 - c. "Brat"
 - d. "Demure"

14. In a major victory for the group and one of the most significant escalations in the conflict between the two countries in years, a rebel militia known as M23 backed by Rwanda announced the capture of what city?
- oil-rich Kasulu in western Tanzania
 - Ngozi in the mountains of Burundi
 - Nairobi, the capital of Kenya
 - Goma in eastern Democratic Republic of Congo
15. In 1970, Bashar al-Assad's father, Hafez al-Assad, took power in a coup. In December, Russia announced that the younger al-Assad had resigned as president of what country and had flown to Moscow to seek refuge?
- Venezuela
 - Myanmar
 - North Korea
 - Syria
16. Streaming a high-definition video takes about 5 million bps. The download rate in a typical American home is about 262 million bps. Researchers, publishing in the journal *Neuron*, said what about the estimated the speed of information flow in the human brain?
- It's about the same, about 250 million bps.
 - It's much faster, about 500 million bps.
 - It's much slower, about 10 bps.
 - It's not possible to calculate.
17. Justin Trudeau announced he was stepping down as prime minister of Canada after serving for nine years. The 53-year-old said he had one regret. What?
- not joining the United States as the 51st state
 - not appointing a cabinet that was 50% women
 - not changing the way Canadians elect their government officials by using ranked choice voting
 - not helping to legalize recreational marijuana
18. After U.S. President Donald Trump berated Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy for being "disrespectful" in an extraordinary Oval Office meeting, the two failed to sign a deal for what?
- access to Ukraine's deposits of so-called rare earth minerals
 - more than \$250 billion of military, humanitarian and other financial aid
 - 80 more multiple-launch rocket systems and ATACMS missiles
 - establishment of a NATO military base in Crimea
19. In a blistering letter that accused top leaders at the Justice Department of looking for a "fool" to dismiss the criminal charges, attorney Hagan Scotten became the seventh person to resign over efforts to dismiss charges against New York City Mayor Eric Adams. What was Adams charged with?
- falsifying business records
 - bribery, fraud and soliciting illegal foreign campaign donations
 - attempting to overturn the 2020 U.S. presidential election
 - mishandling of national security documents

20. As a Texas outbreak has grown from a handful of cases to more than 200 across two states, an unvaccinated child became the first fatality in 10 years from what highly contagious disease?
- Chickenpox
 - Measles
 - COVID-19
 - Smallpox
21. Citing its ability to cause cancer in rats, the Food and Drug Administration said drug manufacturers have until Jan. 18, 2028, to reformulate their products without what?
- Red Dye No. 3
 - aspartame and sucralose
 - eugenyl methyl ether
 - brominated vegetable oil
22. Thousands of protesters were calling for the release of Imran Khan, who was in prison based on charges his party claims were politically motivated. He was prime minister of what country?
- Afghanistan
 - Iran
 - Saudia Arabia
 - Pakistan
23. Major League Baseball will give its players a chance to test some changes this year including what?
- reducing the time of the game from nine innings to seven like softball
 - a pitch clock that gives Pitchers 18 seconds to throw the ball with runners on base
 - replacing all on-field umpires with cameras and artificial intelligence
 - the Automated Ball-Strike System, a robotic system to call balls and strikes
24. As part of a crackdown on Western culture, Kim Jong Un, the third Supreme Leader of North Korea, reportedly made eating what an act of treason?
- hot dogs
 - apple pie
 - Buffalo wings
 - Girl Scout cookies
25. California Gov. Gavin Newsom declared a state of emergency as H5N1 outbreaks spread southward from dairies in the state's Central Valley. H5N1 is also known as what?
- swine influenza
 - influenza D virus (IDV)
 - grippe
 - bird flu
26. After he pushed a social security spending bill through Parliament, Michel Barnier lost a no-confidence vote, making him the shortest-tenured prime minister in modern history of what country?
- French Guiana
 - Australia
 - France
 - Canada

27. ***Ne Zha 2* is being hailed as a symbol of progress in Chinese film and a sign that domestic productions can rival Hollywood blockbusters at the box office. Why?**
- It was created using artificial intelligence and a budget of only \$80 million, the lowest budget ever for a film grossing \$1 billion.
 - It became the highest-grossing animated film of all time, approaching \$1.9 billion in China alone.
 - The Chinese government recalled the film, yet the film still grossed \$1 billion in China on the black market.
 - It grossed more than \$2 billion worldwide, making it the first animated film to ever reach that level.
28. **According to the United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification, human-driven climate change is leading to what change on 77.6% of the Earth's land masses?**
- increased salt content of inland seas and lakes
 - a permanent state of increased dryness
 - record rainfall, including powerful storms and flooding
 - increase in coarse atmospheric dust, causing a 220% increase in pulmonary illness
29. **It sold for \$6.2 million with fees at Sotheby's contemporary art auction and was the star of a 2019 conceptual artwork, "Comedian," by the noted prankster Maurizio Cattelan. What?**
- cryptocurrency
 - a photo of the U.S. Capitol, complete with installation instructions
 - a solid-gold toilet
 - a banana duct-taped to a wall
30. **In just over 100 days since the Olympics closed, more than 100 athletes have asked for their medals to be replaced. Why?**
- The medals were not made of environmentally friendly materials as the athletes had been told.
 - The medals, made by LVMH, the luxury goods empire owned by France's richest family, were crumbling.
 - The Olympic Committee was considering countries as future sites for the Olympics that didn't uphold human rights ideals.
 - Some athletes considered a symbol on the medal to be offensive.
31. **A winter storm brought more than three to four inches of snow to what city, a city that has no plows and hasn't had as much snowfall since 1960?**
- Austin
 - Houston
 - Fort Worth
 - San Antonio
32. **In December, a spacecraft, roughly the size of a small car, came closer to what object in the solar system than any human-made object ever has before?**
- Mercury
 - comet 67P/Churyumov-Gerasimenko
 - the sun
 - the asteroid Apophis

33. **The installation was dubbed Fort Liberty in 2023 as part of an effort to rename military installations that honored Confederate leaders. Now, same base, different Bragg. The Fayetteville, N.C., Army base known as Fort Liberty will once again be Fort Bragg. Who is the namesake?**
- Sir William Henry Bragg, an English physicist, who shared a Nobel Prize with his son Lawrence Bragg
 - Janet Bragg, the first Black woman to get a commercial pilot's license
 - Roland L. Bragg, a private first class who was stationed at Fort Bragg before fighting in World War II
 - Craig Bragg, an American football wide receiver
34. **Usually found at depths of between 330 and 15,000 feet, what sea creature was seen in February near the surface in what might be the first-ever sighting of the species in broad daylight?**
- the giant isopod
 - a dumbo octopus
 - the flapjack octopus
 - black seadevil anglerfish
35. **Up 0.98% on July 1, 2023 — the highest year-over-year increase since a jump of 0.99% between 2000 and 2001 — the U.S. population reached what according to Census Bureau figures released in late December?**
- 340.1 million
 - 58 million
 - 31,290,831
 - 8,194,840,623
36. **Two days after the Local Government Committee unanimously approved the bill, the Texas Senate quickly and unanimously advanced SB 4, a marquee tax proposal, to the House. SB 4 would do what?**
- provide record funding to schools by requiring all property tax increases to fund teacher pay increases
 - provide funding through sale taxes for Texas police to arrest people for illegally crossing the Mexico border
 - provide billions of dollars in tax breaks to homeowners
 - provide funding for school vouchers, about \$1 billion
37. **On Feb. 19, Microsoft's scientists said they had created what is known as a "topological qubit." What is that?**
- a type of quantum computer that utilizes anyons, a type of quasiparticle
 - the newest Microsoft operating system, "better, faster, stronger"
 - an artificial intelligence computer that can interact as though it were human
 - a new form of energy
38. **The email, titled "What did you do last week? Part II," echoed an email that instructed whom to reply with a list of around five accomplishments from their workweek?**
- about 2.3 million federal workers
 - employees of Boeing
 - all appointed employees working in federal, state or local government
 - employees of Tesla, SpaceX, X (formerly Twitter), Neuralink, xAI and The Boring Company

39. A large UK study has found further evidence that people can help reduce their risk of bowel cancer by consuming what?
- a. More antioxidants, the equivalent of half of a glass of red wine per day
 - b. More calcium, the equivalent of a glass of milk per day
 - c. More iron, about three servings of red meat, including steak, per week
 - d. More caffeine, about two cups of coffee per day
40. He was the first Democrat to call for impeachment during President Donald Trump's first term in the White House, and now Rep. Al Green, D-Texas, is believed to be the first lawmaker in modern history to do what?
- a. loudly vocalize objections for any speaker while on the floor of Congress, a violation of the rules of decorum
 - b. get elected to the House of Representatives as a convicted felon
 - c. get thrown out of a joint session of Congress or a State of the Union address
 - d. wear a pink suit in solidarity with others as a symbol of power and protest

THE ESSAY

NOTE: *Contestants who do not write an essay will be disqualified.* Essay length is not a major grading factor as long as the essay is substantial and demonstrates a sincere effort to discuss the assigned topic. Cover as many corners of the issue as practical, including historical, political, economic, social and cultural, when relevant. Avoid including your personal opinions, as more than enough information on the subject has been published.

A focused, concise and specific essay beats a vague and rambling essay.

PROMPT

In his 2025 State of the State address, Texas Gov. Greg Abbott outlined seven emergency items as legislative priorities for the current session, including education, taxes and technology. Pick any THREE of Abbott's items and discuss the historical, political, economic, social and cultural background of each of the issues.

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ANSWER KEY

**POTENTIAL DISCUSSION POINTS PREPARED March 13, 2025
might include, but should not be limited to...**

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| 1. A | 21. A | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • <i>Republican control:</i> The 89th Texas Legislature convened on January 14, 2025, with Republicans maintaining control of both chambers. • <i>From the speech:</i> Abbott laid out seven emergency items that he said would help Texas remain a national leader: cutting property taxes, a “generational investment” in the state’s water infrastructure, increasing teacher pay, beefing up vocational career training programs for students after high school, allowing the use of public dollars for private education purposes, stiffening the state’s bail laws and creating a cybersecurity hub in San Antonio. • <i>Conservative agenda:</i> Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick also outlined sweeping conservative agenda with list of top 25 legislative priorities including proposals to cut property taxes, shore up the state’s electric grid and water supply, and infuse religion into public schools. The top two bills are the state budget, Senate Bill 1, and a voucher-like education savings account program, Senate Bill 2. • <i>School choice:</i> Abbott said the state “must be No. 1 in educating our children.” School voucher legislation failed, despite repeated attempts in the last legislative session. This became Abbott’s No. 1 priority. SB2 easily passed the Senate and legislators were hopeful it would pass the House. Under this legislation, families would receive up to \$10,000 per year per student to use for tuition, textbooks, transportation, and therapy at an accredited private school. Children with disabilities would receive up to \$11,500 per student. The bill would use \$1 billion of the state’s budget surplus to fund around 100,000 education savings accounts. About 80% of funds would go to families with special needs children or those earning under \$161,000 per year. Critics of school vouchers in Texas argue that they hurt public schools by taking away funding and giving private schools an unfair advantage. • <i>Teacher pay raises:</i> Recognizing the critical role of educators, Abbott proposed increasing teacher salaries to attract and retain quality professionals in Texas schools. In designating it an emergency item, Abbott said, “We must fund and train the best teachers. That starts with giving our teachers a pay raise this session. To increase teachers’ average salary to an all-time high, I am declaring teacher pay an emergency item. Additionally, we must reward the best teachers by putting them on a path to earn a six-figure salary.” • <i>Property tax relief:</i> Texans pay some of the highest property tax bills in the country. Abbott emphasized the need to provide substantial property tax relief to Texans. Texas lawmakers have vowed to provide tax relief to property owners, and the House and Senate have so far agreed to spend at least \$6 billion in state funds to do so. But the two chambers have competing ideas about how to deliver the cuts. Both chambers want to send \$3 billion to school districts so they lower their tax rates, a tax-cut method known as “compression.” Decreasing the tax rate would lower property tax bills for homeowners and business owners alike. • <i>Regulation of THC products:</i> A law from 2019 allowed the commercialization of hemp products with THC levels under 3%. Lawmakers argue that the consumable THC products being sold in stores are unregulated and often contain more THC than what is legally allowed. SB3 aims to ban all hemp products containing THC, addressing concerns over unregulated high-THC products like gummies that have emerged due to a loophole from a 2019 farm bill. The bill has sparked significant debate, with advocates arguing for better regulation rather than an outright ban, emphasizing the potential impact on businesses and consumers who rely on these products for health reasons. • <i>Water infrastructure:</i> Highlighting the importance of sustainable resources, Abbott called for significant investments in water infrastructure to support the state’s growing population and economic activities. The governor also asked lawmakers to make a “generational investment” in the state’s water infrastructure, saying it was an issue that affected every family and business. “Some of our water supplies are drying up,” he said. “Many communities have leaking and broken water lines. Agriculture producers in the Rio Grande Valley and out in West Texas, they don’t have water to be able to grow their crops.” • <i>Bail reform:</i> To enhance public safety, Abbott called for a constitutional amendment to prevent judges from releasing violent offenders on bail, citing concerns that current policies allow dangerous individuals to reoffend upon release. He said “activist judges” have too much discretion to let repeat offenders out on bail, “only to see them harm more Texans.” • <i>Creation of a Texas Cyber Command:</i> Abbott said he wants the state to lead in the field of cybersecurity and proposed the creation of a “Texas Cyber Command” in San Antonio, to help fight off attacks from hostile foreign nations like Russia, China and Iran. Abbott also threw his support behind a bill that would bar people from countries designated as hostile foreign nations from owning land in the state. He also said people who are not U.S. citizens should not be allowed to work in state and local government. |
| 2. C | 22. D | |
| 3. B | 23. D | |
| 4. A | 24. A | |
| 5. B | 25. D | |
| 6. A | 26. C | |
| 7. C | 27. D | |
| 8. D | 28. B | |
| 9. C | 29. D | |
| 10. B | 30. B | |
| 11. B | 31. B | |
| 12. D | 32. C | |
| 13. A | 33. C | |
| 14. D | 34. D | |
| 15. D | 35. A | |
| 16. C | 36. C | |
| 17. C | 37. A | |
| 18. A | 38. A | |
| 19. B | 39. B | |
| 20. B | 40. C | |