

Big blow for Hardeman as GP plant plans to close

Georgia Pacific has announced it will be closing its Hardeman County gypsum plant and moving out of the Quanah area, leaving more than 150 employees uncertain about their future.

The company has been a staple of Hardeman County for generations, with many community members either having worked there or having a family member who has.

Tom Johnson, superintendent of Quanah ISD told Amarillo TV station KFDA that the loss will be a big blow to the community. The schools are significantly up in enrollment but Johnson is afraid the employees from Georgia Pacific will leave Quanah to find work elsewhere, taking with them a large portion of the already small population.

"We have a vast dependence on the plant, just because of payroll, because they are the livelihood of very many of our families," Johnson said. "We hate to lose something that has been such a huge part of our community, and we just don't want the potential loss of population because Quanah is a good place. Quanah has a lot of things going for it, we are seeing an upsurge in population and we want to keep the people here."

In addition to students, many spouses of Georgia Pacific employees are teachers, which would cause a loss in workers, teachers, and students.

The company will be opening up a new 285-million-dollar facility near Sweetwater, Texas. They say this location will keep logistic cost low and give them

more access to trucks and products.

The company credited State Senator Charles Perry with getting the plant built in Sweetwater, which will close the Hardeman County plant.

"We are extremely proud that Georgia-Pacific continues to have confidence in the state of Texas and Nolan County," said Perry. "Georgia-Pacific's decision to build a \$285-million-dollar plant in West Texas demonstrates its ongoing dedication to creating good jobs and new opportunities for the people of Texas. This once again proves that Texas' responsible regulatory environment and low taxes will keep Texas a leader in job creation for years to come."

Georgia Pacific will also move the pro-

duction that comes out of the acme facility near Quanah to Fletcher, Oklahoma.

The company says they plan to close the facility near Quanah in two years.

"We know this is very very challenging for the community of Quanah. We are committed to that area, to do what we can, but again, this was a business decision and it wasn't taken lightly," said Yana Ogletree, public affairs manager at Georgia Pacific. "Again, we want to be transparent, we want to treat our employees right, we want to treat the community right, and that is why we are doing two push years out."

Georgia Pacific is offering the employees a transfer to other facilities within the company or pay for skills training.

Wilbarger County ballot were already printed, without straight-party option

Federal judge blocks Texas' elimination of straight-ticket voting

Less than three weeks before early voting begins in Texas, a U.S. district judge blocked the state from eliminating straight-ticket voting as an option for people who go to the polls this November. Then, on Monday a Federal Court of Appeals blocked that order.

Wilbarger County is taking a wait-and-see approach. The county had already printed its ballots, and if the ruling stands, will have to reprint ballots. Wilbarger County Clerk Jana Kennon said she is waiting for directive from the Texas Secretary of State.

In a ruling issued late Friday, U.S. District Judge Marina Garcia Marmolejo cited the coronavirus pandemic, saying the elimination of the voting practice would "cause irreparable injury" to voters "by creating mass lines at the polls and increasing the amount of time voters are exposed to COVID-19."

She acknowledged the burden the decision could put on local and state election officials, who will have to recalibrate voting machines or reprint ballots. But she reasoned that the potential harm for those suing, including the Texas Alliance for Retired Americans, was "outweighed by the inconveniences resulting."

The day after the ruling, Texas Attorney General

Ken Paxton released a statement saying that his office filed a motion to stop the judge's order and intends to file an immediate appeal of the district court's ruling.

"I am disappointed that the Court departed from its prior reasoning and imposed straight ticket voting only weeks before a general election," Paxton said.

On Monday, U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fifth Circuit granted Paxton's request for an administrative stay.

"I will not stand by when the integrity of our election process is threatened. The 2020 general

election is already underway. Any changes to the process now could jeopardize the fair and accurate administration of the election," said Attorney General Paxton. "Election officials across the state have taken the necessary precautions to ensure that voters can vote safely, and I will continue to protect the integrity of our elections."

The popular practice of straight-ticket voting allowed general-election voters to vote for all of the candidates of either party in an election by simply picking a straight-ticket option at the top of the ballot. But Texas Repub-

lican lawmakers championed a change to the law during the 2017 legislative session, arguing it would compel voters to make more-informed decisions because they would have to make a decision on every race on a ballot.

Most states don't allow for one-punch voting, but its elimination in Texas met intense opposition from Democrats, who fear the change will be most felt among voters of color and lead to voter drop-off, particularly in blue urban counties that have the longest ballots in the state. In Harris County, for example, ballots can go on for pages because of the num-

ber of state district judges and other local officials up for election. Democrats worried that having to vote on each individual race would slow people down, causing longer lines at the polls.

Over the past four presidential elections, one-punch voting has generally proved more popular among Democrats in Texas' 10 largest counties. About two-thirds of people who voted in Texas in the 2018 general election used the straight-ticket option.

Although the change was signed into law almost three years ago, a last-minute amendment

to the legislation delayed its implementation until this year's general election. The delay proved ill conceived for the majority party in 2018, when down-ballot Republicans faced a rout in urban counties where Democrats were aided by straight-ticket voting.

The Texas Democratic Party joined other Democratic groups and candidates in suing the state in March to overturn the law, but Marmolejo dismissed the case. Another suit was then filed, but with the Texas Alliance for Retired Americans added as plaintiff and the state party removed.

Money available to weatherize homes

Atmos Energy, through its Fueling Safe and Thriving Communities program, will donate \$1 million to help customers stay warm this winter or weatherize their homes.

The local distributor of the funds is Rolling Plains Management Corp. 940-723-2261 or call 211.

"With one out of every four households that lost jobs during the COVID-19 pandemic reporting they either skipped a utility payment or needed to skip a utility payment, we know that eligibility for financial assistance programs is growing," said Katrina Metzler, executive director at the National Energy & Utility Affordability Coalition (NEUAC). "Energy insecurity often coincides with food insecurity, housing insecurity and other emerging needs. Reaching out to community partners as Atmos Energy has done will mean one less frigid home on a winter morning, one less hungry child, and will protect the health and safety of the families in the communities served."

In addition to this donation, Atmos Energy offers year-round relief through energy assistance programs such as, Sharing the Warmth. Customers may locate an agency by calling 211.



CMS's Top Score*

**OVERALL
PATIENT
SATISFACTION**



Raising the Standard of Care

Wilbarger General Hospital has achieved CMS's Five Star rating based on overall patient satisfaction, responsiveness, timeliness, safety, communication and cleanliness. Now more than ever, we're your first choice.

**For more information call 940-552-9351
or visit WGHospital.com**

920 Hillcrest Dr • Vernon, TX, 76384



**WILBARGER
GENERAL HOSPITAL**

* According to medicare.gov