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13 Houstonians earn spot on Forbes billionaires list



Inside C2

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Visa waivers rarely granted under Trump’s latest U.S. travel ban

WASHINGTON/NEW YORK (Reuters) - In the first weeks after President Donald Trump’s latest travel ban was implemented on Dec. 8, around 100 waivers were granted to thousands of applicants for U.S. visas from the eight countries subject to its restrictions, according to State Department data provided to Reuters.

Between Dec. 8 and Jan. 8, more than 8,400 people applied for U.S. visas from Chad, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Syria, Somalia, Yemen and Venezuela, the countries listed in the ban.

Of those, 128 applicants qualified for visas because they fell into categories exempted from the ban, according to a letter from the State Department sent last month to U.S. Senator Chris Van Hollen, a Democrat. Exemptions to the ban are made for lawful permanent residents of the United States and certain other categories of applicants. The ban contains a provision that those who do not qualify for exceptions can be considered for waivers in special circumstances, such as a need for urgent medical care or to accommodate adoptions. Waivers can also be granted to those previously granted visas who want to return to employment or studies in the United States. Significant business obligations or close U.S. family ties can also be taken into consideration for a waiver.

As of Feb. 15 only two of the initial month’s applicants had been approved for the waivers, according to the letter, which was seen by Reuters. Since then, more than 100 additional waivers have been granted, the State Department told Reuters on Tuesday. It was not clear how many of those additional waivers went to applicants from the initial month.

The White House did not immediately respond to a request for comment about the issue. A State Department official said the policy is being implemented as called for in the president’s proclamation.

Van Hollen, along with Republican Senator Jeff Flake requested information about visas from the State Department in late January, saying in a letter to the agency and the Department of Homeland Security that they had “received reports of the near uniform denial of waivers for visas.”

“The Trump administration claims that the waiver system can be used by people who pose no threat to our country.... But these facts show that system is a farce designed to hide President Trump’s true purpose,” Van Hollen said in a statement to Reuters on Tuesday. “Appellate courts have found that this is a de facto Muslim ban in violation of our Constitution and our immigration laws, and this high refusal rate bears that out.”

Six of the eight countries included in the ban are majority Muslim. The Trump administration has said the travel ban is needed to protect U.S. residents from terrorism.

Courts struck down the first two versions of the Republican president’s travel ban, and the current one is narrower in scope than its predecessors. The Supreme Court will consider its legality this spring, and a decision is expected in June.

Many visa applications from the eight countries were denied even before the travel ban. And since it took effect, more than 1,700 of the 8,400 visa applications were denied for reasons other than the travel ban, according to the State Department’s data.

Exact comparisons with previous years are not possible, because data is not available for



FILE PHOTO: International travelers (reflected in a closed door) arrive on the day that U.S. President Donald Trump's limited travel ban goes into effect at Logan Airport in Boston

all types of visa applications. But for the 2016 federal fiscal year, State Department data shows that applicants from the eight countries were refused tourist and business visas, called B visas, at rates of between 15 percent and 64 percent, depending on the country. North Koreans had the lowest rate of denials, while Somalis had the highest. In the first month after the travel ban took effect, more than 95 percent of U.S. visa applications from the countries were denied. Attorneys representing applicants abroad who were turned down for visas say consular officials have not clearly explained why their clients did not qualify for waivers.

“There is a feeling of extreme frustration. People are operating basically in the blind,” said Diala Shamas, an attorney at the Center for Constitutional Rights, a New York-based nonprofit group that assists Yemeni applicants waiting for visas at the U.S. embassy

in Djibouti. “An outsider might think that the impact of the proclamation would be mitigated by the waivers, but in reality that is not at all the case.”

Trump’s proclamation of a travel ban outlined three broad requirements for a visa waiver. Applicants must face undue hardship if denied a visa, the travel must be in the U.S. interest and the applicant must not pose a security risk.

For an applicant to be cleared of being a security threat, consular officers are told to consider “the information-sharing and identity-management protocols of the applicant’s country of nationality as they relate to the applicant,” according to the letter.

That last consideration could prove complicated for most applicants, given that the reason a country winds up on the banned list is that it does not meet U.S. standards for information sharing and identity management.

Trump sees ‘possible progress’ in North Korea denuclearization

WASHINGTON/SEOUL (Reuters) - U.S. President Donald Trump said on Tuesday he saw “possible progress” in denuclearization efforts with North Korea after South Korea said Pyongyang would be willing to meet with the United States and suspend nuclear tests while talks proceed.

The United States, South Korea and China responded with cautious optimism about North Korea’s willingness to talk, a development that follows months of insults and threats of war between Trump and the North.

But some U.S. and South Korean officials said a breakthrough remained unlikely after the failure of previous talks, adding that North Korea may be trying to buy time to develop its weapons programs and seek relief from punishing American and U.N. sanctions.

“Possible progress being made in talks with North Korea,” Trump wrote in a Twitter post. “For the first time in many years, a serious effort is being made by all parties concerned. The World is watch-

ing and waiting! May be false hope, but the U.S. is ready to go hard in either direction!”

There was no immediate comment from Pyongyang. The news came as a South Korean delegation returned from a first-ever meeting with North Korean leader Kim Jong Un in Pyongyang on Monday. The two sides will hold their first summit in more than a decade next month at the border village of Panmunjom, said Chung Eui-yong, the head of the South Korean delegation. The last inter-Korean summit was in 2007 when late former president Roh Moo-hyun was in office.

“North Korea made clear its willingness to denuclearize the Korean peninsula and the fact there is no reason for it to have a nuclear program if military threats against the North are resolved and its regime is secure,” Chung told a media briefing.

Chung cited North Korea as saying it would not carry out nuclear or missile tests while talks with the international community were under way. North Korea has not carried out any such tests since last



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un shakes hands with Chung Eui-yong who is leading a special delegation of South Korea's President, in this photo released by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA) on March 6, 2018

November. North Korea also is willing to discuss normalizing ties with the United States, Chung said.

North and South Korea are experiencing a significant easing in tensions since the Winter Olympics in

the South last month, even though they are technically still at war because their 1950-53 conflict ended in a truce rather than a peace treaty.

China encouraged North and South Korea to continue their reconciliation efforts.

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13 Houstonians earn spot on Forbes billionaires list

By Katherine Feser

Thirteen Houstonians again earned a spot on Forbes's World Billionaires list, though most saw their fortunes diminish over the past year. Rich Kinder, chair of oil and gas pipeline giant Kinder Morgan, held his place as Houston's richest billionaire, ranking No. 281 on the list of 2,208 billionaires with a net worth of \$6.2 billion, the magazine reported. Kinder was among seven Houstonians whose net wealth declined since last year's Forbes list. He lost a billion in net worth, down 14 percent from \$7.2 billion reported in 2017. Among Texans, Kinder ranked behind only Alice Walton, who gained her fortune from Wal-Mart and ranked No. 16 with a net worth of \$46 billion; Mi-

chael Dell, No. 39 with a net worth of \$22.7 billion; and Andrew Beal, No. 132 with a net worth of \$11.6 billion. Forbes magazine named Mark Wahlberg the world's highest paid male actor, earning a staggering \$68 million between June 2016 and June 2017. Wahlberg, 46, who starred in films including "Daddy's Home 2" and "Transformers: The Last Knight", topped last year's winner and this year's second place holder, Dwayne "The Rock" Johnson's earnings by \$3 million. The list also high-



lighted the gender pay gap in Hollywood, with Forbes' top earning female actor, "La La Land" star Emma Stone, taking home \$26 million – a figure that wouldn't see her break the top 10 in the male actor category. When comparing the male and female lists, the 10 highest-paid leading men earned a total \$488.5 million before tax, nearly three times more than the \$172.5 million earned by the top 10 scoring women. Forbes includes film or TV salaries and commercial endorsements in the estimated earnings but does not deduct taxes and management fees. Also in the top 10 among Texans are Dannine Avara, Scott Duncan, Milane Frantz and Randa Williams. They shared the No. 334 position on the list, with a net worth of \$5.5 billion each.

That's down from last year net worth of \$5.7 billion each. The 13 Houstonian's average net wealth of \$4.1 million mirrored the average of all the world billionaires on the 32nd annual list. Tilman Fertitta, owner of the Houston Rockets, Landry's and Golden Nugget Casinos, showed the biggest jump in wealth. A 48 percent gain from a year ago placed him at No. 499, with \$4.3 billion in net wealth. Last year, Fertitta ranked No. 693 with a fortune estimated at \$2.9 billion. Other local billionaires include: Dan Friedkin, owner of Gulf States Toyota, No. 550, with \$4 billion in net worth. That's up from \$3.6 billion in March of 2017. Robert McNair, owner of the Houston Texans, No. 588, with \$3.8 billion in net worth. That's up 9 percent from \$3.5 billion a year ago. Jeffery Hildebrand, co-founder of private oil and gas company Hilcorp, No. 629, with \$3.6 billion in net worth. His fortune is down 16 percent from a year ago.

New Medicare cards coming soon

by Lisa Weintraub Schifferle
Attorney, FTC, Division of Consumer and Business Education

New Medicare cards are coming soon. Here's what you need to know about your new card. Plus, how to avoid related scams. Starting in April 2018, Medicare will begin mailing new cards to everyone who gets Medicare benefits. Why? To help protect your identity, Medicare is removing Social Security numbers from Medicare cards. Instead, the new cards will have a unique Medicare Number. This will happen automatically. You don't need to do anything or pay anyone to get your new card.

Medicare will mail your card, at no cost, to the address you have on file with the Social Security Administration. If you need to update your official mailing address, visit your online Social Security

account or call 1-800-772-1213. When you get your new card, your Medicare coverage and benefits will stay the same. If your sister who lives in another state gets her card before you, don't fret. The cards will be mailed in waves, to various parts of the country, from April 2018 until April 2019. So, your card may arrive at a different time than hers. You can check the rollout schedule to get a better idea when you may be receiving yours. When you get your new card, be sure to destroy your old card. Don't just toss it in the trash. Shred it. If you have a separate Medicare Advantage card, keep that because you'll still need it for treatment.

As the new Medicare cards start being mailed, be on the lookout for Medicare



scams. Here are some tips:

Don't pay for your new card. It's yours for free. If anyone calls and says you need to pay for it, that's a scam. Don't give personal information to get your card. If someone calls claiming to be from Medicare, asking for your Social Security number or bank information, that's a scam. Hang up. Medicare will never ask you to give personal information to get your new number and card. Guard your card. When you get your new card, safeguard it like you would any other health insurance or credit card. While removing the Social Security number cuts down on many types of identity theft, you'll still want to protect your new card because identity thieves could use it to get medical services. For more information about changes to your Medicare card go to go.medicare.gov/newcard. And if you're a victim of a scam, report it to the FTC.

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A Snapshot Of The World



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un poses for photographs with South Korean delegation led by Chung Eui-yong, head of the presidential National Security Office, in Pyongyang



North Korean leader Kim Jong Un shakes hands with a member of the special delegation of South Korea's President



LEGO House in Billund, Denmark, March 6, 2018. Scanpix Denmark/Mads Claus Rasmussen via REUTERS ATTENTION EDITORS



Stoneman Douglas Band Director Alexander Kaminsky is seen during a band rehearsal in New York



An official of India's CBI escorts men suspected of steering fraudulent loans to companies linked to billionaire jeweller Nirav Modi outside a court in Mumbai



A board, advertising the campaign of Russian President Putin ahead of the presidential election, is on display in Stavropol



A member of the security personnel keeps watch at the end of the opening session of the National People's Congress in Beijing



Journalist reports on a ladder outside the Great Hall of the People during the opening session of the National People's Congress (NPC) in Beijing



Man lights candles during the fourth annual remembrance event for the missing Malaysia Airlines flight MH370, in Kuala Lumpur

Eight months before construction crews are expected to begin renovations work on the now-shuttered Astrodome, some groups already are hatching plans to make use of the famed stadium’s nine acres.

Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo officials see space for hundreds of commercial exhibitors who were wait-listed even as the annual event shattered attendance records.

Ken Lovell, president of the Houston International Boat, Sport and Travel Show, envisions a display of watercraft in the aging stadium harkening back to a 1960s event held there.

The non-profit Astrodome Conservancy is crowd-funding and seeking donors to host music, art and dance events, Chairman Phoebe Tudor said.

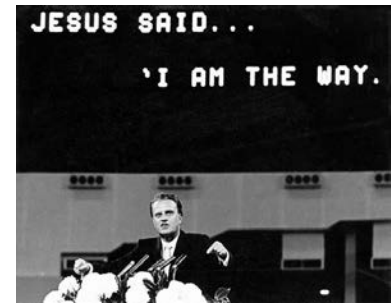


April 9, 1965: Opening Day, with President Johnson and Texas Gov. John Connally on hand for an Astros-Yankees exhibition game. Mickey Mantle launches the first Astrodome home run, but the Astros win, 2-1.

The emerging enthusiasm comes as Harris County Commissioners Court voted unanimously Tuesday, February 13th, to move forward with the final design and construction of a \$105 million project to transform the cherished piece of Houston’s sporting history into what officials hope will be coveted event space.

“It gives us a huge national story line,” said Holly Clapham, chief marketing officer for Houston First Corp., the city’s main marketing arm. “This, obviously, is a very significant building and we can tell the story of its new life, and serving a new constituency that didn’t know it as the ‘Eighth Wonder of the World.’”

Construction on the project is expected to begin in October and end in February 2020.



Nov. 19, 1965: Billy Graham, who described the Astrodome as “one of the wonders of the world” (which Judge Roy

Harris County OKs \$105 Million Renovation Of Astrodome

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



Hofheinz amended to “Eighth Wonder of the World”), begins a crusade that draws 376,419 to the Dome.

“The first thing we have to do is get it back to where it’s structurally sound,” Harris County Judge Ed Emmett said after Tuesday’s court meeting. “Nine acres of open space, under cover, in Houston, Texas, is a big deal. We’ve already been contacted by all sorts of groups that want to come use it, so it’s exciting.”

The court’s approval came more than four years after Harris County voters rejected a \$217 million bond proposal that would have paid for massive renovations to the 53-year structure.

Many interpreted the vote as a public mandate to demolish the stadium that once was home to the Houston Oilers and Astros, hosted countless major sporting events.

The Dome has not housed a professional sports team since the Astros moved to Minute Maid Park in 2000. NRG Stadium opened in the Dome complex two years later to serve as the home of the NFL’s Houston Texans.



Dec. 17, 1965: Judy Garland, with the Supremes as opening act, presents the first

Astrodome concert.

The Houston fire marshal’s office declared the massive building unfit for occupancy in 2009. Attempts to develop a plan to re-purpose the Dome produced numerous ideas, from an indoor amusement park to movie studio space, but failed to generate actual financing to pull any of those off. One idea would have seen the stadium stripped to its steel skeleton and ground beneath turned into green space.

Since then, the county has sold off thousands of dome seats and pieces of AstroTurf to longtime fans and collectors.

Tuesday’s vote was not unexpected. Commissioners Court signaled its intention to renovate the dome rather than raze it in September 2016 with a vote to begin the “design phase” of the project.

Four months later, the Texas Historical Commission designated the Astrodome a state antiquities landmark, giving the stadium special protections against demolition.



June 18, 1967: Rookie Don Wilson no-hits the Braves, striking out 15 in a 2-0 victory. The historical commission must sign off on the renovation plan, and the Dome’s designation as

a landmark means it cannot be demolished or altered without a permit from the commission. A historical commission spokesman said Tuesday that the county had not yet submitted an application for the permit.

Critics of the plan to re-purpose the stadium have latched on to the cost, as well as the timing of Tuesday’s vote less than six months after Hurricane Harvey devastated the Houston metropolitan area. Money being spent on the Dome renovation could be better spent beefing up the region’s flood protections, critics said.

In the wake of Harvey, Harris County leaders have proposed a bond issue of more than \$1 billion be put before voters to boost flood control efforts.

According to Emmett, about of third of the \$105 million cost to refurbish the Dome into convention and meeting space would come from the county’s property tax-supported general fund. The reminder would be funding by hotel occupancy taxes and parking revenues.



Dec. 22, 1973: The first high school championship game at the Astrodome featured a future Houston favorite – Earl Campbell, who ran for 164 yards and two TDs in

Tyler John Tyler’s 21-14 win over Austin Reagan. (Above: Earl Campbell runs for the Houston Oilers.)

State Senator Paul Bettencourt, R-Houston, who co-sponsored legislation last year that would have required a public referendum on the Astrodome project, called Tuesday’s vote by Commissioners Court “tone deaf.”

“We just need to recognize the obvious,” Bettencourt said in a statement. “If the county has money to ignore a public vote and refurbish the Astrodome, then they have the capability to offer flooded-out homeowners disaster reappraisal and to cut their property tax rate.”

Bettencourt and Lt. Gov. Dan Patrick have called on local taxing jurisdictions to allow residents whose homes were damaged by Harvey to have their properties reappraised to reflect their lower values.

Through a spokesman, Emmett called Bettencourt’s remarks “ill-informed” and said the project would allow the county to generate revenue for upgrades to the NRG Complex that otherwise would fall on taxpayers.



Feb. 27-March 1, 1970: Elvis Presley performed six shows at the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo for a combined 207,494 fans. He returned for two shows on March 3, 1974, before 88,149.

The county spends about \$170,000 a year to maintain the Dome in NRG Park, located on South Loop 610, largely for electric bills and flood insurance.

The renovation project has drawn the support of the Houston Texans and the Houston Livestock Show and Rodeo, the two major tenants of NRG Park.

Tudor said Tuesday that the Astrodome Conservancy and the county are holding an event dubbed a “Domecoming” on April 9, well before the construction starts to give people a peek inside the stadium before it is locked down for construction.

“We’re just delighted and thrilled that such a great structure with such a great history is going to be preserved and reused,” she said. (Courtesy <https://www.chron.com/news>)

Last Week President Trump Unveiled His Plan For Import Taxes On Steel, Aluminium

China Says It Does Not Want A Trade War With The U.S.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor



China will produce--and consume--more steel in 2018.



President Trump says he believes tariffs on imports will safeguard American jobs.

Trump has long sought a way to a more balanced trade relationship with China and is also considering potential trade sanctions against Beijing under a “Section 301” investigation into China’s intellectual property practices and pressure on foreign companies for technology transfers.

His administration has said the United States mistakenly supported China’s membership in the World Trade Organization in 2001 on terms that have failed to force Beijing to open its economy.

Diplomatic and U.S. business sources say the United States has all but frozen a formal mechanism for talks on commercial disputes with China because it is not satisfied Beijing has met its promises to ease market restrictions. (Courtesy <https://www.cnbc.com>)

Related

Ray Dalio: Trade war with China would be a ‘tragedy’

Bridgewater Associates founder Ray Dalio stated in a LinkedIn blog post he believes an acceptable trade deal be-

tween the U.S. and China is possible. “It seems to me that good deals are to be had for both countries, while a trade war has the risk of tit-for-tat escalations that could have very harmful trade and capital flow implications for both countries and for the world,” Dalio writes.

Dalio’s firm manages about \$160 billion, according to its website.



President Donald Trump and China’s President Xi Jinping (not shown) make a joint statement at the Great Hall of the People on November 9, 2017 in Beijing, China.

“It seems to me that good deals are to be had for both countries, while a trade war has the risk of tit-for-tat escalations that could have very harmful trade and capital flow implications for both countries and for the world,” Dalio wrote in a LinkedIn blog post entitled “A US-China Trade War Would Be a Tragedy.” “I think and hope that both sides know this, and I believe that what is happening now is more for political show than for real threatening.”

President Donald Trump announced on Thursday plans for tariffs of 25 percent on imported steel and 10 percent on aluminum, sparking fears of a trade war and spurring a sell-off in the stock market.

The hedge fund manager said the size of the tariffs announced thus far will have a “very small” impact on U.S.-China trade balances.



Bridgewater Associates found-

er Ray Dalio said last Monday that a trade war between the U.S. and China is avoidable.

“If tariffs are imposed as indicated, I would hope and expect the Chinese response to be small and symbolic so that both sides will have rattled their sabers without actually inflicting much harm,” he wrote. “What will come after that will be more important. I wouldn’t expect it to amount to much anytime soon. If on the other hand we see an escalating series of tit for tats, then we should worry.”

Dalio founded Bridgewater Associates in 1975. The hedge fund now manages about \$160 billion, according to its website. (Courtesy <https://www.cnbc.com>)



Chinese Vice Foreign Minister Zhang Yesui

“China does not want to fight a trade war with the United States, but we absolutely will not sit by and watch as China’s interests are damaged,” Zhang, who is a spokesman for parliament and was formerly an ambassador to the United States, said.

“If policies are made on the basis of mistaken judgements or assumptions, it will damage bilateral relations and bring about consequences that neither country wants to see,” he said.

Trump believes the tariffs will safeguard American jobs, but many economists say the impact of price increases for users of steel and aluminium, such as the auto and oil industries, will destroy more jobs than curbs on imports create.

Nonetheless, there is growing bipartisan consensus in Washington, and support within the U.S. business community, for the U.S. government to counter what are seen as Beijing’s predatory industrial policies and market restrictions on foreign firms.



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