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RAVEN PETROLEUM REFINERY

Public meeting goes private?

Sudden change leaves concerned citizens out

By Julia Wallace
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

Seven minutes before the CEO of Raven Petroleum was scheduled to speak at the Jim Hogg District Courtroom on Tuesday, the meeting was suddenly moved to a private residence, the home of Jim Hogg County Judge Humberto Gonzalez.

A county constable then blocked several members of the

public from entering Gonzalez's home, according to Tricia Cortez, of South Texans Against the Refinery, or STAR.

Christopher Moore, CEO of Raven Petroleum, announced in November that his company would be building the country's first refinery in 40 years near the Webb County border line, about six miles outside Hebbronville and four miles from Bruni.

Raven continues on A12



Courtesy / South Texas Economic Development Alliance

The South Texas Economic Development Alliance uploaded this photo to their Facebook page after Tuesday's meeting in Hebbronville. Christopher Moore and Tomas Puente, Raven's project developer, met with Hebbronville business owners and County Judge Humberto Gonzalez, according to the organization.

LAREDO POLICE

Woman hit by SUV dies

By César G. Rodriguez
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

A woman who was hit by a vehicle Monday has died, according to Laredo police.

Gloria Castillo, 75, was crossing the street in the 200 block of Convent Avenue when a 2016 GMC Terrain struck her. Castillo was airlifted to a San Antonio hospital for further care. She was pronounced dead Tuesday, according to police.

At 11:35 a.m., police responded.
Woman continues on A5

RAVEN

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Initially, the announcement incited hope in public officials that the refinery would be an economic boost to this rural area. However, in the months since, Webb County Judge Tano Tijerina has withdrawn his support, citing a lack of transparency in the company.

"I have not gotten any education other than 'it will be green and state-of-the-art,'" Tijerina said in February. "My question is: what are they building? Because they don't even know yet. They won't even tell me."

Cortez said she called the Jim Hogg County judge's office Tuesday morning to ask if the meeting was open to the public, which a member of Gonzalez's staff confirmed.

Gonzalez did not return requests for comment Wednesday, and his office said they could not comment on the story.

When Cortez tried to enter the meeting with nearby landowner Mark Van Es, the constable said the only people allowed in were Hebbronville business owners, and he asked if they were "with the protesters," according to both Cortez and Van Es.

Cortez said these "protesters" were a group of attorneys and landowners in the Bruni area with

questions and concerns.

Van Es operates land in Webb County near Hebbronville, and said his air and water quality would be affected by a refinery so close by, which is why he's against it. He is a member of STAR but also a local, he said.

"It makes zero sense to exclude somebody like me," Van Es said.

Cortez said it was one of the stranger moments she's encountered.

"It's just so strange because (the meeting) gets moved seven minutes before from a public location to the private home of the judge who has a constable on his property to turn people away. ... It continues with this whole thing of no information and no transparency," Cortez said.

Van Es is displeased that Moore hasn't held any type of public meeting since the refinery was announced.

"We know nothing. It's very bizarre. In my opinion, no serious business operates this way, nor do serious government officials," he said.

STAR has held two town hall meetings since Raven announced its plans for the refinery. The group is concerned largely with the proposed site for the project, which is four miles down wind from Bruni High School. Van Es said he has a little girl who would be attending the school in a few years,

another of his concerns.

Also, Raven has yet to file any permits with the Texas Commission for Environmental Quality, a necessary legal step for the refinery to move forward with construction.

Marisa Yvette Garcia-Utley, the consultant for the South Texas Economic Development Alliance, said she attended the meeting and hand-delivered invitations to local business owners.

Van Es said he heard about the meeting through friends and that the flyers were making their way around Hebbronville.

"It's a small town. You know how that works," he said.

Garcia-Utley was not sure if the meeting was supposed to be public, but said that it was not meant to be a town hall.

"We got word that it would be wiser to have as a private meeting," Garcia-Utley said, so they moved it to Gonzalez's home. "... Mr. Moore wanted to introduce himself to the small business communi-

ty and let them know that (Raven) is coming."

None of the business owners asked about any potential environmental issues the refinery could bring, but rather about how soon they can expect to see an economic impact in their town, Garcia-Utley said.

Moore assured everyone that Raven is taking every precaution to make this a safe refinery, Garcia-Utley said.

Moore could not be reached for comment.

The South Texas Economic Development Alliance is an offshoot of the Tri-County Coalition, which signed a memorandum of understanding in support of the refinery. The group has since lost the support of County Judge Tijerina and consists now of seven counties, according to Michael Gonzalez, director of TAMU's Small Business Development Center.

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