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JIM HOGG COUNTY

Officials left uninformed

Commissioners want to be advised on refinery's progress

By Julia Wallace
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

The Jim Hogg County Commissioners Court said at their Monday meeting that County Judge Humberto Gonzalez has systematically left them uninformed regarding any progress with the proposed nearby refinery by Houston-based oil company Raven Petroleum.

"I do want to make the public aware that the four commissioners sitting at the table here today are not in the loop on a lot of things that are being dis-

cussed. In fact I think the public knows more than we do," Commissioner Humberto Martinez said.

Because Gonzalez did not attend the regularly scheduled meeting, commissioners decided to table the item, which was to clarify that none of them has been advised of any Raven refinery operations.

But they went through with an eight-minute discussion, which was recorded and uploaded to YouTube by BREATH South Texas, a group that has



Gonzalez

come out against the proposed refinery.

Commissioner Sandalio Ruiz said what he has learned about this project has come from the county

judges in Duval and Zapata counties.

"They let us know more than our own county judge. And that's shameful and disgusting. I don't like it," Ruiz said at the meeting.

This item was put on the agenda after a meeting with Raven CEO Christo-

pher Moore was moved from the Jim Hogg County District Courtroom to Gonzalez's home last Tuesday.

Residents of Webb and Jim Hogg counties who were planning to attend what they thought was a public meeting were blocked from entering the judge's home.

Judge Gonzalez did not return several requests for comment by LMT, but wrote on his Facebook page that "this was never promoted as a public meeting but rather a meeting between our invited busi-

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COMMISSIONERS COURT

Center nearing completion

County still owes construction company

By Julia Wallace
LAREDO MORNING TIMES

The Fernando A. Salinas Community Center is on track to be complete by Sunday, according to several officials at the Webb County Commissioners Court meeting on Monday. However, they are not sure exactly how much money is still owed to the company working on the building, Zertuche Construction.

"It's been a long process. We started paying him in 2011 and we'll finish paying him in 2017,"

Center continues on A12

JIM HOGG

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ness community and Raven officials."

Commissioner Martinez said he found out about the meeting when he saw a public notice posted on the counter at the Hillcrest Drive Inn Grocery in Hebbronville.

Commissioners Court also had a special-called meeting the morning Raven came into town. Martinez said it was never brought up to them.

"Most county judges — what they know, the commissioners know," Ruiz told LMT after Monday's meeting.

Gonzalez is vouching for the \$500 million refinery because of the economic turn it could bring

to Jim Hogg County. Its proposed site is in Duval County, but it's about six miles from Hebbronville, Jim Hogg's county seat.

"We are not going to allow (protesters) to stunt our economic growth, jobs and quality of life that this project will bring. Our community will be transformed forever. Our people will not have to commute to Laredo, Corpus and other places to seek decent jobs," Gonzalez wrote on Facebook.

Ruiz said he is unsure that Jim Hogg will see much of an economic benefit because the county will not receive any property tax revenue from Raven. He foresees that the county will accrue about \$50,000-\$60,000 a year from sales

tax, which he said isn't enough to warrant this secrecy.

"If (the refinery is) good for the environment and it's good paying jobs, that's what you want. But this secrecy!" Ruiz said.

The commissioner said his first interaction with any officials from Raven was three or four weeks ago when Moore spoke at the First National Bank in Hebbronville. Ruiz, who didn't get to speak with Moore, was invited to the event by Zapata County Judge Joe Rathmell.

"I shook (Moore's) hand, probably, but I didn't talk to him," Ruiz said. "I don't think he even knows I exist."

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