2026 HCoM AWARDS CEREMONY

HONORING EXCELLENCE IN JOURNALISM

MASTER OF CEREMONIES



ANTONIO HERNANDEZ
Telemundo Houston
KTMD

Antonio Hernandez is a news anchor for Noticiero Telemundo Houston, which airs weekends at 4:30PM and 10PM on Telemundo Houston/KTMD, the local station serving the Spanish-speaking community in the Houston area. As part of the Noticiero Telemundo Houston team, Hernandez reports on breaking news.

BEST ELECTION COVERAGE

1ST

SOUTHERN CHINESE DAILY NEWS

Story

"A cross-party vote by two Democratic lawmakers sparks controversey over party disciplinary action."

Summary

Two centrist House Democrats representing working-class districts broke Houston's Korean American softball league — a community tradition once drawing over 1,000 players and fans in the '80s and '90s — returns after a decade-long hiatus caused by generational turnover and the pandemic, reports Tzuchang Tung for Korean Journal Houston. In a nine-week summer season fielding players from 13-year-old Little Leaguers to people in their 60s, Korean Central Presbyterian Church went 11-2-1 to claim its second straight title.



2ND

MICHAEL ESPARZA

¡Que Onda! Magazine

Story

"Exclusive Interview: Congresswoman Sylvia Garcia on Housing, Immigration and Her Re-Election Campaign"

Summary

In a pre-primary interview, Rep. Sylvia Garcia, the first Latina to represent Texas's 29th Congressional District, traces her path from a South Texas farmworker family to Congress and explains her plans to respond to rising housing costs, threats to health insurance subsidies and fear of immigration enforcement in Houston communities — including her Restoring Community Trust Act, which would bar the federal government from forcing local police to enforce immigration detainers. Garcia also discusses serving in the minority party, the federal money she brought home for flood control, transit and clinics, and redistricting that she says dilutes the voices of Harris County's 2 million Latinos.

BEST ARTS, CULTURE & SPORTS COVERAGE



1ST

TZU-CHANG TUNG

Korean Journal Houston

Story

"Great Harmony Transcending Genertions, Ethnicities, and Genders: The Houston Korean Softball 2026 Summer League"

Summary

Houston's Korean American softball league — a community tradition once drawing over 1,000 players and fans in the '80s and '90s — returns after a decade-long hiatus caused by generational turnover and the pandemic, reports Tzuchang Tung for Korean Journal Houston. In a nine-week summer season fielding players from 13-year-old Little Leaguers to people in their 60s, Korean Central Presbyterian Church went 11-2-1 to claim its second straight title.



2ND

TODD SMITH

Regal Magazine

Story

"Miss Texas USA Taylor Davis Discusses Legacy, Leadership"

Summary

In a video interview with RegalMag.com recorded the day before she left for the Miss USA competition in Reno, Taylor Davis — an Allen native and the fourth Black woman to be crowned Miss Texas USA — responds to critics who dismissed her as a DEI pick to represent the nation's winningest pageant state. Crediting her confidence to her time at Howard University, where she had her first Black teacher, Davis also discusses working as a social media data analyst for the NFL in a male-dominated field, a mentorship under 2016 Miss USA winner Deshauna Barber and competing for several years before she won the Texas crown.

BEST COMMUNITY ADVOCACY



1ST

DAVID CLARKE
OutSmart Magazine

Story
"Erasing Color, Erasing Community: Erasing Houston's Rainbow Crosswalks"

Summary
David Clarke's three-part series for OutSmart documents how the state-ordered erasure of Montrose's rainbow crosswalks — a 2017 memorial to Alex Hill that Gov. Greg Abbott ordered removed under a state ban on "non-standardized" crosswalk designs — became a flashpoint over LGBTQ+ visibility and local control in Houston. The series follows the story from a coalition of LGBTQ+ organizations that organized against the order, through predawn power-washing and arrests of protesters, to Bering Memorial United Church of Christ painting its own front steps rainbow in response.

2ND

NADIA RAJPOOT
Desi TV USA

Story
"How Houston Families Keep Their Homes"

Summary
In a Jan. 26, 2026, broadcast Desi TV USA anchor Nadia Rajpoot updates viewers on a powerful El Niño storm — likely to be the biggest in a century — hitting the UK this autumn. Officials warn that the storm brewing over the Pacific will bring increased rainfall and storms, while leftover rain will turn to ice on roads and overpasses, leading to vehicle sliding risks; residents are urged to stay home, avoid unneeded travel and follow official weather updates.

BEST COVERAGE OF ECONOMY & SMALL BUSINESS

1ST

TEXAS CHINESE RADIO

Story

"Ask Me About Taxes: Safe and Sound"

Summary

Hosted by CPA Ninggang Yao, Texas Chinese Radio's "Ask Me About Taxes: Safe & Sound" translates complex tax rules, financial regulations and economic policy into practical, in-language guidance for Chinese-speaking listeners in Houston. Built around listeners' real-world questions, episodes cover e-commerce tax compliance, real estate partnerships, property tax exemptions, Social Security, retirement and estate planning, trusts, overseas income and international assets.



2ND

DOMINGO BANDA

La Prensa de Houston

Story

"Will The Price of Tomatoes Go Up?"

Summary

In a Spanish-language report for La Prensa de Houston, Domingo Banda answers a question striking a chord in Latino kitchens: Will the price of tomatoes rise? Drawing on USDA, FDA and Commerce Department data, he explains how the end of a nearly three-decade U.S.-Mexico tomato agreement in July 2025 triggered a more than 20% antidumping duty on most tomato imports from Mexico — which comprise 69% of the fresh tomatoes available in the U.S. — and why consumers should expect higher prices later in the year..

BEST YOUTH & EDUCATION COVERAGE

1ST

POOJASAI KONA, ARIS KIAN, ARIANA LEE and **ANDREA HERNANDEZ**
Shift Press

Story

"Students Speak Up, Call Out and Advocate for the Community"

Summaries



High school journalist **Poojasai Kona** argues that federal defunding of public media gives school administrators cover to censor student reporters, and that the risk falls hardest on the 32 states without New Voices laws protecting student press freedom. Tracing what she calls a "top-down trickle of censorship" from national media to school newsrooms, and drawing on her own interviews with student advocates and the Student Press Law Center, she makes the case that who controls what young people are allowed to write shapes both local coverage and pipelines into professional newsrooms.





Houston Youth Poet Laureate **Ariana Lee** talks with **Aris Kian**, the youngest person ever named Houston Poet Laureate, about how the academic literary world sidelines spoken word poetry and about using a city-backed title to advocate for her people rather than for City Hall. Kian also talks about the state takeover of the Houston Independent School District including the conversion of local school libraries into discipline centers, against the joy and hope she finds in Houston's slam poetry community.



Taking her story's title from a Harris County commissioner's description of the county's "healthy working relationship" with ICE, which transferred 3,600 people to federal custody in 2023, **Andrea Hernandez** traces how local cooperation feeds deportations through county jail-bed contracts, ICE detainers issued without judicial warrants, and a state law requiring sheriffs who run jails to sign 287(g) agreements. She argues these partnerships push crime victims into the shadows, citing a Salvadoran woman who called HPD to report domestic abuse and was flagged for an ICE warrant, and shows how jails jeopardize detainees during disasters like Hurricane Harvey.

BEST YOUTH & EDUCATION COVERAGE

2ND

TEXAS CHINESE RADIO

Story

"Hand-in-Hand Parenting Time" and *"Impact of AI on Youth"*

Summary

For more than 20 years, Texas Chinese Radio host Pamela Hu and University of Houston–Victoria education professor Hsin-Hui Lin have brought child development knowledge to Chinese-speaking families through "Hand in Hand: Parenting Time," pairing academic research with everyday questions on topics ranging from parents' roles, children's spending money and perfectionist parenting. In one featured episode on AI and youth, Lin calls the technology's impact on childhood "a very expensive experiment," warning that kids who lean on AI unsupervised can miss the tone, facial expressions and body language they learn from human interaction.

BEST ENVIRONMENT COVERAGE

1ST

XIN PING and YI YONGJI

New Tang Dynasty Television (NTDTV)

Story

"Abandoned apartments pose a safety hazard and will be demolished and renovated to improve the environment"

Summary

A Spring Branch apartment complex that sat abandoned for years, turning into a fire hazard and a magnet for crime, will be razed and redeveloped into public safety and flood-control infrastructure, Xin Ping and Yi Yongji report for NTD Television. With a total investment of more than $137 million, including $18.6 million to acquire the complex and $2 million to demolish it, the property will be replaced by 2030 with a new police station, a fire station and an underground flood detention facility expected to protect more than 1,000 nearby homes.

BEST ENVIRONMENT COVERAGE



2ND

EGHOSA EDEBOR

Christian Herald, Disaster Preparedness

Story

"How Texas Families Can Prepare Before Disaster Strikes"

Summary

Drawing from a Houston Community Media briefing for The Christian Herald, Edebor turns advice from Harris County emergency management and nonprofit leaders into a preparedness guide for Greater Houston families facing hurricanes, floods, freezes and extreme heat. Pairing the argument that "preparedness is a year-round responsibility" with a warning from Harris County Deputy Emergency Management Coordinator Brian Murray that "no level of government can sustain five million people for a day," Edebor walks readers through building a seven-to-10-day supply kit, understanding insurance deductibles and flood coverage, signing up for Ready Harris alerts, calling 211 for help and finding local emergency resources.

BEST ESSAY



1ST

AYAAN MOLEDINA

Shift Press

Story

"Living Through the Darkness: My Journey with Mental Health Advocacy"

Summary

In a first-person essay written during National Suicide Prevention Month, 16-year-old advocate Ayaan Moledina writes about living with depression, OCD and anxiety since he was 10, surviving a suicide attempt after classmates ignored his calls for help, losing a close friend to suicide and watching his mosque community cut off mental health discussion after his friend's funeral. Describing his work as federal policy director for Students Engaged in Advancing Texas, he argues that policy alone won't save young lives without empathy from the schools, parents, faith leaders and peers around them.

BEST HEALTH & HEALHCARE COVERAGE



1ST

DOMINGO BANDA

La Prensa de Houston

Story

"In the Fight Against Cervical Cancer, the Common Cold and Blood Pressure"

Summary

A series of public service reports raising awareness of cervical cancer, flu vaccine, common cold and blood pressure prevention guidelines, tailored for the local Spanish- speaking community. These health advisory reports emphasize the importance of regular screenings to prevent cervical cancer, vaccinations to combat severe complications during peak seasonal illness and lifestyle modifications, risk assessment and early treatment to help adults manage high blood pressure.



2ND

JAY MALHOTRA and GAUTAM SINHA

Indo American News Radio

Story

"Women and Menopause with Dr Anushree Kumar"

Summary

On this Indo American News Radio broadcast, hosts Jay Malhotra and Gautam Sinha talk with Dr. Anushree Kumar, a certified menopause specialist in Sugar Land, about what happens to women's bodies during perimenopause and menopause, including research showing South Asian women tend to reach menopause earlier — up to a third reach it before 45 — which raises long-term heart and metabolic risks. Kumar explains how hormone therapy can relieve symptoms and protect long-term health, especially for women who had their ovaries removed, and urges listeners to find doctors who look at a woman's whole health, including ruling out thyroid disease or iron deficiency.

BEST IMMIGRATION COVERAGE



1ST

JOSÉ LUIS CASTILLO and LAURA CLISÁNCHEZ, La Esquina TX

Series

"They Come Looking For One Person and Take Others"



Summary

In "Terrenos Houston: El Sueño Americano Embargado ("Houston Land: The American Dream Foreclosed"), a three-part, in-language investigation for La Esquina TX, Castillo and Clisánchez examine Colony Ridge, a 33,000-acre development in Liberty County whose promise of affordable land turned into owner-financed lots sold at interest as high as 12.9% with no check on buyers' ability to pay, pushing mostly Latino families into foreclosure. The series follows the buyers who lost everything, while political rhetoric branding the area a crime and illegal immigration hotspot brought immigration raids that silenced residents, though federal and state lawsuits, that ultimately led to a $68 million settlement in February 2026.

2ND



MIGUEL MEJIA

La Prensa de Houston

Story

"Revoking Visas, Birthright Citizenship and New Migrant Detention Centers"

Summary

In a series of in-language special reports for La Prensa de Houston published from July 2025 to August 2026, Miguel Mejía gives a running account of the Trump administration's immigration crackdown, from the opening of tent detention camps at Florida's "Alligator Alcatraz" and Fort Bliss in El Paso to militarized zones that now cover about a third of the U.S.-Mexico border. Drawing on civil rights lawyers, lawmakers, border residents and federal officials, the series documents violent arrests, harsh detention conditions, 1,400+ migrants charged with trespassing in military zones, hundreds of thousands of planned visa cancellations and a Supreme Court fight over birthright citizenship that could redefine who gets to be an American.

INFLUENCER OF THE YEAR



BELL WHITE - @TotallyRandie

About

Bell White, known as TotallyRandie, is a Houston-based digital journalist and content creator who works as National Social Media Correspondent for NNPA's Black Press of America and also curates content for Houston Style Magazine. On TotallyRandie.com and across her social channels, she mixes culture coverage with reporting on issues facing Black communities, including the redistricting behind Rep. Al Green'ss primary defeat after 21 years in Congress and the crash of an 18-wheeler freight truck that killed four young Texas women. Her additional work for BlackPressUSA ranges from interviews on prostate cancer among Black men to coverage of Houston community initiatives including Travis Scott's Cactus Jack Foundation STEM program teaming up with NASA, and the city's Movement Festival honoring George Floyd.



RYAN TEJERO

@onepinoytx - One Philippines Texas

About

Ryan Tejero, editor of One Philippines Texas, is a Houston-based community journalist and content creator who covers Filipino life in Texas. Across One Philippines' social channels, he mixes cultural pride content with direct political access — landing a one-on-one interview with Senate candidate James Talarico, securing credentialed access to The Texas Tribune Festival, and amplifying Mayor Gina Ortiz Jones' engagement with the Filipino community.

BEST WEBSITE

FORWARD TIMES - www.forwardtimes.com

The digital home of the Houston Forward Times, the Black newspaper founded in 1960 and still run by the Carter family, publishes original reporting on the local news, politics, business, health and culture issues that matter most to the Black community it serves. Judges singled out its original reporting and ease of reading; its editorial depth made it the standout entry.