

Abbott refugee plan overruled

Federal agency says governor can't trump federal laws

By **Brian M. Rosenthal**
AUSTIN BUREAU

AUSTIN — The federal government on Wednesday informed refugee resettlement agencies in Texas and across the country that states do not have the authority to refuse to accept Syrians.

The statement, made in a letter obtained by the Houston Chronicle, appears to mark the first time federal refugee pro-

gram officials formally have rejected statements by governors, including Greg Abbott of Texas, that their states will not accept any Syrian refugees.

It also may signal that federal officials will place Syrians here and elsewhere regardless of governors' wishes.

"States may not deny (Office of Refugee Resettlement)-funded benefits and services to refugees based on a refugee's country of origin or religious affilia-

tion. Accordingly, states may not categorically deny ORR-funded benefits and services to Syrian refugees," wrote Robert Carey, director of the office, adding that states and agencies that do not comply would be violating the law and "could be subject to enforcement action, including suspension or termination."

Carey's two-page letter also emphasized that refugees seeking to come to the United States undergo heavy scrutiny over an

average of two years of waiting, a point that President Obama and other federal officials have been trying to make in recent days.

Abbott's office declined comment on the letter.

A spokesman for the Texas Health and Human Services Commission, which oversees refugee resettlement in the state, said the letter will not change its position.

"The Health and Human

Services Commission will continue to follow the directive of Gov. Abbott, which calls for the State of Texas to not participate in the resettlement of Syrian Refugees," said the spokesman, Bryan Black.

Wednesday's letter largely tracks with what legal experts have been saying in the days since Abbott and more than 30 other governors said they would not accept Syrian refugees due to security concerns fueled by terrorist attacks in Paris earlier this month. The governors,

Refugees continues on A7



Photos by Bob Owen / San Antonio Express-News

Samantha Sanchez started Sam's Covers, which raises funds to buy materials for homemade blankets donated to children.

Covers to give comfort to kids

Teen and her nonprofit hand out blankets for children in need

By **Vincent T. Davis**
STAFF WRITER

Samantha Sanchez and several friends arrived at the Roy Maas Youth Alternatives' The Bridge carrying plastic bags stuffed with 80 handcrafted blankets.

Some pieces were made a half-hour before they arrived at the shelter for children recovering from abuse. Many of the blankets were made in the summer by Samantha's small army of volunteers for Sam's Covers, the nonprofit the teen founded four years ago.

Inside the shelter, Samantha, 13, and the girls emptied the blankets from the bags onto a table. Several residents selected a cover from the pile that almost towered over their heads. The youths, ages 10 to 17, chose blankets covered with anchors, cats, fruit slices, flowers, soccer balls and stripes. They thanked Samantha and



Natalia Nunez (from left), Alexis Pales, Aubrey Huston, Jayme Hammond and Brook Lester help hand out blankets they helped make for friend Samantha Sanchez, founder of Sam's Covers, to youths at Roy Maas Youth Alternatives' The Bridge.

"I like seeing the joy on the faces of kids. It's something they can call their own, a personal thing they can have."

Samantha Sanchez, founder of Sam's Covers

her fellow good Samaritans in unison. It was the first time she'd ever met her recipients. "I like seeing the joy on the faces of kids," Samantha said as some youths wrapped their gifts around their shoulders.

"It's something they can call their own, a personal thing they can have."

The stop at The Bridge on Basse Road was part of Samantha's mission to offer children in need comfort through

her nonprofit. Sam's Covers raises funds to buy materials used to make the homemade blankets she donates to the children.

In the past, Samantha, an eighth-grader at Lope Middle School, has also delivered blankets to Haven for Hope and SAMMinistries, which was scheduled to receive 100 blankets Tuesday.

She's enlisted help from friends, Girl Scouts and 80

Covers continues on A6

Gourmet Express ex-owner convicted

Co-founder found guilty in \$3.9M fraud case

By **Guillermo Contreras**
STAFF WRITER

After a month of trial, a federal jury Wednesday convicted a former owner of former San Antonio-based frozen food company Gourmet Express for his role in a \$3.9 million tax fraud scheme.

Jurors found Robert Warren Scully, 70, guilty of conspiracy to defraud the United States, conspiracy to commit wire fraud and three counts of wire fraud. He acquired him of three tax evasion counts. He faces up to 20 years in prison when Senior U.S. District Judge David Alan Ezra sentences him in February.

Scully, who lives in California, was one of three original founders of Gourmet Express, which began its operations in 1997. One of the founding partners was Ken Sliz of San Antonio.

Prosecutors Bill Harris and Jay Hulings alleged that between April 2001 and July 2009, Scully brought in his nephew, Kevin Scully, now deceased, as a minority partner after one of the founders left and that the Scullys used shell companies in Thailand to inflate the prices Gourmet Express paid for shrimp and other ingredients. They also siphoned off a cut of those excess costs, or profits, but did not declare them on taxes, the prosecutors alleged.

The IRS alleged that Robert Scully had an agreement with his sister-in-law, who lives in Thailand and controls one of the companies, that benefited her and the Scullys.

Sliz was not aware that the trio were splitting the profits, the prosecution said.

"Today's conviction is a victory for the American taxpayer and the entrepreneurial spirit of this great country," said William Cotter, special agent in charge of the IRS' Criminal Investigation division. "Robert

Fraud continues on A6

Wimberley Alive hopes to help victims of flooding

Festival looks to counter images of town as destroyed

By **John MacCormack**
STAFF WRITER

Rained out a month ago, the inaugural Wimberley Alive arts and music festival will try it again Friday and Saturday, with organizers hoping for better weather.

The scaled-down version will feature fewer bands and artists, and it will run for two days instead of three. Among the better-known acts are Kevin Welch, Andrew Hardin and Shake Russell.

The event is being held in part to raise money for victims

of the Memorial Day weekend flood, which caused death and extensive damage in communities along the Blanco River.

"We're going to be collecting donations for the nonprofit Barnabas Connection, which is helping the flood victims," said Cathy Moreman, president of the Wimberley Valley Arts and Cultural Alliance.

The alliance, along with Wimberley Valley Radio, is sponsoring the arts and music festival, which took on a greater significance after the disaster.

"There were plans to have

this event, and then the flood happened, so we kind of switched gears and decided to use it as a morale booster and as a fundraiser," she said.

Moreman said the feel-good event will also dispel inaccurate images of Wimberley as having been destroyed by the flood, when, in fact, the business district was hardly damaged.

"We're trying to fight the misperception that the town was dead. CNN stood there with their camera, pointing it at the river, saying this town is gone," she said.

Festival continues on A4



Tom Reel / San Antonio Express-News

Gov. Greg Abbott visits downtown Wimberley in June. That part of town was hardly damaged by flooding a few weeks earlier.