

HOUSTON CHRONICLE

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STAR



TEXAS STARS ARE SHINING

Two dozen *American Idol* finalists — six of whom are from Texas — are in the running for the crown. Find out more about each contestant. **PAGE D1**

SIX ERRORS CITED IN DEATHS OF FIRE CAPTAIN AND ROOKIE

THE STATE FIRE MARSHAL'S REPORT FOUND

- 1 Initial crews failed to make a full, 360-degree size-up of the scene or cut off utilities before going in.
- 2 The two firefighters were unable to communicate with the commanders at the scene; Capt. James Harlow left his radio in the fire engine and firefighter Damion Hobbs' radio was turned off.
- 3 A thermal imager brought by Harlow's team was left outside.
- 4 Harlow and Hobbs stood as they sprayed the fire with water, instead of keeping low to avoid intense heat.
- 5 The firefighters' bodies were found separated from their fire hose, indicating they had abandoned their only guide to exiting the structure.
- 6 The firefighters entered the home before roof ventilation operations were completed, and a hole punched in the roof left them between the fire and the ventilation pathway.

■ State fire marshal focuses on assessment of blaze and failure to use equipment

By JAMES PINKERTON
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

The failure to fully assess a burning home and then entering the smoky blaze without two-way radios or thermal imaging equipment might have contributed to the deaths of a veteran Houston Fire Department captain and a rookie firefighter battling a wind-whipped house fire last Easter, according to an investigation by the state fire marshal's office.

The bodies of Capt. James A. Harlow, 50, and firefighter Damion J. Hobbs, 29, were recovered inside 7811 Oak Vista about 40 minutes after firetrucks first arrived at the southeast Houston residence last April 12. Harlow and Hobbs' engine truck was the first on the scene, at about 12:07 a.m., and the two, along with a third firefighter, mounted a "fast attack," entering the empty home where a fire fueled by 30-mph wind gusts was intensified by the collapse of a large glass wall at the rear of the house.

An elderly couple that lived in the home already had left after seeing smoke and fire coming from a bedroom closet. Arson investigators later blamed the blaze on a loose electrical connection in a light fixture.

"There were several factors that, when combined, may have contributed to the deaths of Captain Harlow and Firefighter Hobbs," concludes a 47-page report compiled

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ANOTHER ARCTIC BLAST

Snow this late in the season?

■ A cold front is making its way here — and it's likely not the last

By ERIC BERGER
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Now comes a fitting book-end to a winter seemingly without end.

Houston already had its earliest snowfall ever this winter, with an inch falling on Dec. 4. Today there's a good chance the city will experience the next-to-latest snowfall in its history, with forecasters saying much of the area could see as much of an inch this evening.

"Rain will likely mix with or change to sleet or wet snow across Montgomery and possibly northern Harris County in between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. today and build quickly south toward the Texas Coast in the evening," said Fred Schmude, a meteorologist with ImpactWeather.

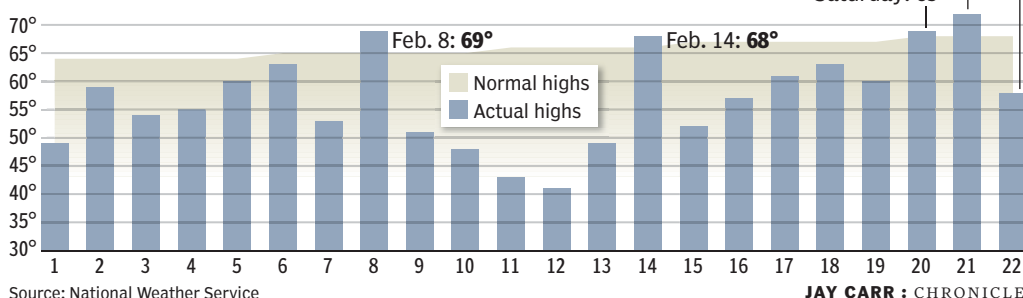
"Snow amounts are forecast to average from 1 to 2 inches north and west of downtown Houston, and from a trace to perhaps as high as 1 inch south and east of downtown Houston and right toward the coast."

The National Weather Service has issued a winter storm watch for today and tonight

Please see **SNOW**, Page A5

CHILLY FEBRUARY

Daily high temperatures at Bush Intercontinental Airport have been below normal on all but four days this month. Today's forecast high is 47 degrees.



Source: National Weather Service

JAY CARR: CHRONICLE



SEEING A KING: Alayna Virnau, 7, watches the king penguins swim at Moody Gardens in Galveston.

MAYRA BELTRÁN PHOTOS: CHRONICLE



TO SCALE: The newborn king penguin chick, being weighed by the aquarium staff on Monday, will be on exhibit for about three weeks.

Perfect weather for a penguin

You might feel a chill this week, but the latest arrival at Moody Gardens Aquarium Pyramid — a king penguin chick, the second from mom Littlefoot and dad Lando — is feeling right at home.

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Obama lays out health care plan

■ President gambles to revive legislation and force GOP's hand

By SHERYL GAY STOLBERG and DAVID M. HERSZENHORN
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — President Barack Obama issued his own blueprint for a health care overhaul on Monday, challenged Republicans to come forward with their ideas and laid the groundwork for an aggressive parliamentary maneuver to pass the legislation using only Democratic votes if this week brings no progress toward a bipartisan solution.

In laying out for the first time the details of what he wants in the legislation, Obama set in motion a new round of maneuvering intended to bring a bitterly divisive yearlong clash to a conclusion. With the two parties scheduled to meet Thursday for a televised session on the health care overhaul, Obama appeared intent on forcing the Republicans into a choice: either put a specific alternative on the table, giving Democrats a chance to draw pointed contrasts between the parties' approaches, or be cast as obstructionist and not serious about addressing an issue of great concern to voters.

The initial GOP response suggested that the two parties

Please see **HEALTH**, Page A5

SPORTS VANCOUVER

A TEAM'S SHOT AT THE GOLD

The U.S. women's hockey team stuns Sweden 9-1, skating into the gold medal round Thursday against Canada.

FULL COVERAGE ON PAGES C1, C7-10

Brown gives jobs bill nudge through Senate

By ANDREW TAYLOR
ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A bipartisan jobs bill cleared a GOP filibuster on Monday with critical momentum provided by the Senate's newest Republican, Scott Brown of Massachusetts.

The 62-30 tally to advance the measure to a final vote on Wednesday gives both President Barack Obama and Capitol Hill Democrats a much-needed victory — even though the measure in question is likely to have only a modest boost on hiring.

Brown and four other Republicans broke with GOP leaders to advance the measure. Most other Republicans voted in favor of the filibuster because of strong-arm tactics by Democratic Majority Leader Harry Reid of Nevada.

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Merger adds doubts to local jobs outlook

■ Schlumberger deal may be blow to local economy

By BRETT CLANTON
HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Already reeling from a string of recent setbacks on the employment front, Houston faces the potential for still more job losses if Schlumberger's \$11 billion deal to buy rival Smith International goes through.

Since both firms keep significant corporate offices

in Houston, many employees here could be affected as Schlumberger seeks to eliminate what it says are duplications in the new corporate structure.

But most of the companies' operations do not overlap, and there will be new opportunities for employment as economic conditions improve and demand grows for its products and services, said Schlumberger spokesman Stephen Whittaker, who called the merger "good for Houston."

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