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Lathan leaving HISD at end of school year

Interim superintendent takes top job in Missouri after three years at helm

By **Jacob Carpenter**
STAFF WRITER

Houston ISD Interim Superintendent Grenita Lathan plans to leave the district at the close of the 2020-21 school year, ending an unusually long three-year run in the position that was marked by fallout from the pandemic, the constant threat of severe state intervention and battles with

some school board members.

In announcing her departure Monday morning, Lathan said she has accepted the job of superintendent of Springfield Public Schools in Missouri starting July 1.

Lathan's departure is expected to coincide with the arrival of a permanent superintendent in June. HISD trustees are in the early stages of selecting a superinten-



Karen Warren / Staff photographer

HISD Interim Superintendent Grenita Lathan, right, wraps up her announcement with a hug on Monday.

dent, an effort delayed by a state order to halt an earlier search and lingering uncertainty about Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath's plans to replace all nine elected school board members.

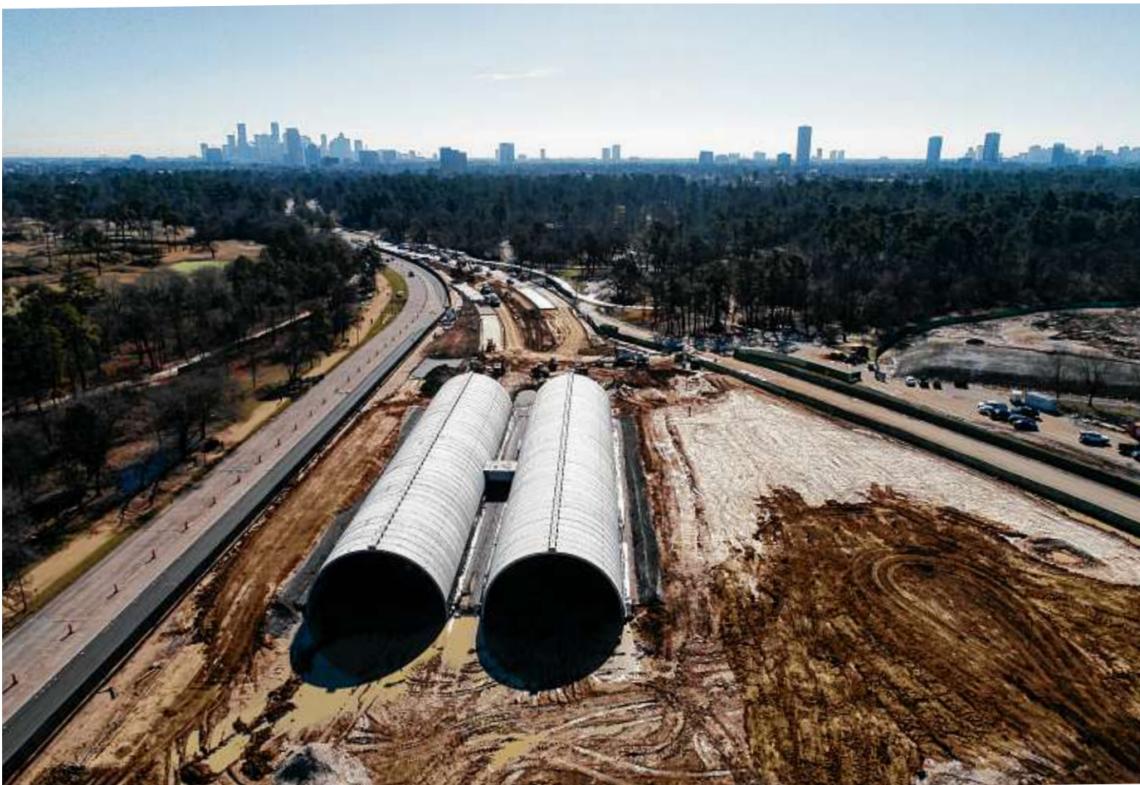
Board members voted against naming Lathan as HISD's long-term superintendent last November, with six of the nine trustees preferring to launch a national search. Lathan said Monday that she considered applying for the position but ultimately decided "it was in

my best interest and the best interest of my family for me to move on."

"I have done the work here in Houston, and I'm proud of what I've been able to accomplish with my team," Lathan said. "But there comes a time when you have to look for other opportunities."

HISD board members unanimously selected Lathan as interim superintendent in March 2018 following the abrupt resignation of Richard Carranza, who left **HISD continues on A10**

Land bridge on the road to completion



Elizabeth Conley / Staff photographer

Tellepsen, a construction company, works on the new tunnels on Memorial Drive near Memorial Park as part of the land bridge and prairie project. The land bridge, which is meant to increase safety in crossing the road, is slated for completion next year as part of the Memorial Park Master Plan.

UK variant is 'actively spreading' in Houston, officials say

Local positivity rate rising as state eases restrictions

By **Jasper Scherer**
and **Dylan McGuinness**
STAFF WRITERS

A more contagious variant of the coronavirus is spreading in Houston and the city's positivity rate crept up last week, Mayor Sylvester Turner announced Monday, two days before all state COVID-19 restrictions are lifted across Texas.

Last month, city officials who sample sewage for traces of the virus detected the B.1.1.7 variant at 31 of the city's 39 wastewater treatment plants, up from 21 plants earlier in the month. A study published last Wednesday estimated the variant, which was first discovered in the United Kingdom, is 43 to 90 percent more infectious than previous variants.

About 19 percent of wastewater samples contained the more contagious variant when it was most recently sampled on Feb. 22, according to a city news release.

"The prevalence of the U.K. variant in our wastewater shows it's actively spreading in our city," said David Perse, the city's public health authority. "This is another clear indication that we must continue to mask up, practice social distancing, wash our hands, get tested and get vaccinated when possible."

Meanwhile, the rate of Houston's COVID-19 tests coming back positive increased last week to 13.1 percent, up from 11.9 percent the week before and a low of 11.2 percent during the winter

Variant continues on A10

Relief bill to deliver health care savings

By **Sheryl Gay Stolberg**
NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — President Joe Biden's \$1.9 trillion coronavirus relief bill will fulfill one of his central campaign promises, to fill the holes in the Affordable Care Act and make health insurance affordable for more than 1

million middle-class Americans who could not afford insurance under the original law.

The bill, which will most likely go to the House for a final vote Wednesday, includes a significant, albeit temporary, expansion of subsidies for health insurance purchased under the act. Under the changes, the sig-

nature domestic achievement of the Obama administration will reach middle-income families who have been discouraged from buying health plans on the federal marketplace because they come with high premiums and little or no help from the government.

The changes will last only for

two years. But for some, they will be considerable: The Congressional Budget Office estimated that a 64-year-old earning \$58,000 would see monthly payments decline from \$1,075 under current law to \$412 because the federal government would take up much of the cost.

Health care continues on A10

FAILURES OF POWER

Why were rotating outages uneven?

By **Paul Takahashi**
STAFF WRITER

Kay Swint went without power for 53 hours during last month's winter storm, forcing the retired nursing director to crank up her gas fireplace, layer on two pairs of socks and go to bed in her son's sleeping bag to stay warm.

As the polar vortex plunged Houston into frigid darkness, the temperature inside Swint's 1957 Braesmont home fell to 43 degrees, bursting six pipes in her attic and saddling the 69-year-old retiree with a

\$2,500 repair bill.

Across town, Deep Datta lost power in his Heights apartment just once, for all of three hours. When the power and heat went out Feb. 17, the 27-year-old environmental engineer said he put on a jacket when it got a little chilly inside.

"I know for some people, it was more of a life-threatening situation," Datta said. "For me, it wasn't as bad. It was kind of an inconvenience. I was fairly comfortable the whole week."

The starkly different experiences of Swint and Datta



Godofredo A. Vásquez / Staff photographer

Kay Swint, a Braesmont resident, went without power for 53 hours during the winter storm.

GOP hints at plans to challenge Abbott

By **Jeremy Wallace**
AUSTIN BUREAU

AUSTIN — As Gov. Greg Abbott races to reopen all businesses and end mask mandates this week, it hasn't been fast enough to defuse escalating political pressure from fellow Republicans who see Texas lagging behind other states in dropping COVID-19 restrictions.

For months, Abbott has taken barbs from conservatives who have held up Florida Gov. Ron DeSantis as a measuring stick to



Huffines

show Texas is reopening too slowly, fueling talk that Abbott will face something he's never seen: a real

primary battle.

"We are glad Governor Abbott is following the example of Governor Ron DeSantis of FL & Governor Kristi Noem of South Dakota & opening up Texas," Texas Republican Party Chairman Allen West said

Abbott continues on A9

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