



LOCAL CHEFS' RECIPES FOR A SUPER PARTY FLAVOR

ROCKETS GET A BREATHER IN ROUT OF KINGS SPORTS

HOUSTON ★ CHRONICLE

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Partly cloudy: High 77, Low 59

Supreme Court nominee echoes Scalia

Trump's choice is seen as favorite of conservative legal establishment

By Robert Barnes
WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump selected Colorado federal appeals court judge Neil Gorsuch as his Supreme Court nominee on Tuesday, opting for a highly credentialed favorite of the conservative legal es-

tablishment to fill the opening created by the death of Justice Antonin Scalia.

Gorsuch prevailed over the other finalist, Thomas Hardiman of Pennsylvania, also a federal appeals court judge, and Trump announced the nomination at a televised prime-time event at the White House.

Gorsuch, 49, and Hardiman, 51, emerged from a list of 21 as Trump's most likely choices. A third person on the shortlist — U.S. Circuit Judge William Pryor Jr. of Alabama — saw his chances diminish as some Senate Republican leaders have said his confirmation would be difficult.

By comparison, Gorsuch was confirmed a decade ago to the U.S. Court of Appeals for the 10th Circuit in Den-

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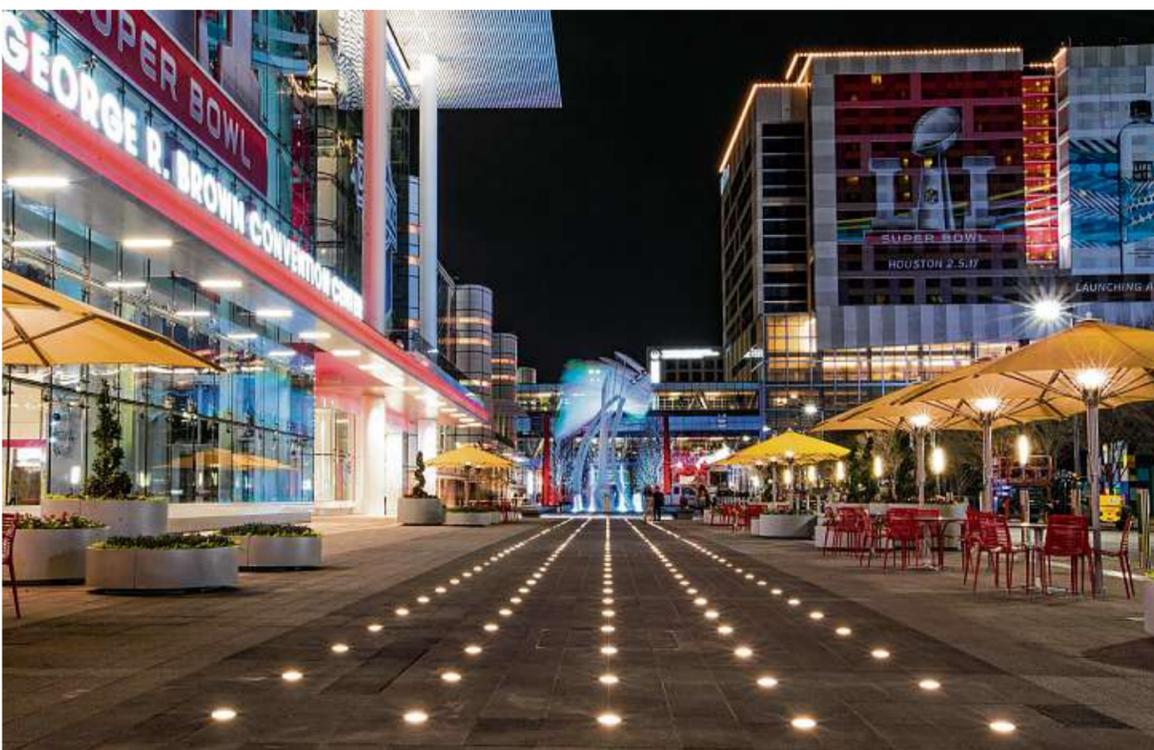
» Democrats stall action on Trump's most important Cabinet nominees. **Page A10**
» Three states file suits against Trump's immigration order. **Page A10**

ver on a voice vote. Gorsuch is seen as a less bombastic version of Scalia; he also believes in an "originalist" interpretation of the **Court continues on A13**



Brendan Smialowski / AFP / Getty Images
President Donald Trump introduces Supreme Court nominee Neil Gorsuch, who is joined by his wife, Louise.

A new attitude for downtown



Michael Ciaglo / Houston Chronicle

The Avenida Houston, the new civic plaza in front of the George R. Brown Convention Center, was a \$175 million facelift.

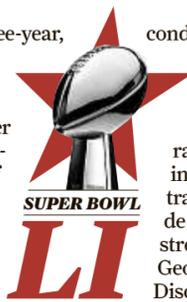
By Diane Cowen

"This is great," Houston resident Blake Burger enthused Saturday as his 9-year-old son and a friend struck poses for photos. The new Avenida Houston plaza outside the George R. Brown Convention Center was buzzing with street life, Burger noted: "It's a serene and usable environment in the middle of what used to be a concrete jungle."

That reaction would please

George R. Brown's Avenida plaza more about people than their cars

the backers of the three-year, \$175 million Avenida project. Its goal is to create a sense of place, said Peter McStravick, chief development officer of Houston First Corporation, showing off downtown Houston as a place to live and play — not just to



conduct business.

With that in mind, Avenida took what, for Houston, was a radical step: Removing several lanes of traffic from Avenida de las Americas, the street between the George R. Brown and Discovery Green, and

dedicating that square footage instead to wide sidewalks, public art, Mexican sycamore trees and restaurants with outdoor seating.

Though two-way traffic still rumbles through the remaining two street lanes, the space now feels much different: It's less about cars and more about people.

And it's a clear sign of how Houston is changing.

When the George R. Brown opened in 1987, on the rela- **Avenida continues on A14**

Abbott urges CPS reform, freezes hiring

Sanctuary cities, ethics high on governor's agenda

By Mike Ward and Brian M. Rosenthal

AUSTIN — Gov. Greg Abbott detailed his vision for Texas on Tuesday, imploring lawmakers to approve "emergency" legislation on child protection, ethics and so-called sanctuary cities, ordering a hiring freeze for most state agencies and proposing a budget that would cut business franchise taxes by \$250 million.

"Let's keep Texas the most exceptional state in America," the first-term Republican said in his State of the State speech to lawmakers.

The ambitious agenda, which included calls for lawmakers to criminalize the donation of organs of aborted fetuses, increase funding for pre-kindergarten and approve a resolution for a constitutional Convention of the States, is expected to kick-start the legislative session.

Some legislative leaders quickly pushed back on Abbott's proposals, saying they were misguided and potentially unaf-

Abbott continues on A15

Confusion in final hours of Obamacare

Enrollees feel unsure amid push to repeal and replace

By Jenny Deam

Just after 4 p.m. Tuesday, Princess Osuchukwu didn't need to say a word as she headed for the door at the storefront enrollment center in a north Houston strip mall. The relief was in her eyes, the set of her shoulders, the smile that stretched wide.

"Thank you. Thank you. Thank you all so much," the 48-year-old Nigerian-born green card holder, her health insurance in hand, called out merrily to no one in particular in what were the final hours of the final day of an enrollment period for a law that may soon be dismantled.

Last year, the Katy woman was uninsured. This year she has coverage, signing up at the last minute through the Affordable Care Act's federal exchange for a silver plan for which she will pay \$92.78 a month after receiving a \$660 monthly subsidy.

"Oh my goodness, I am so happy," Osuchukwu said as she clutched her informa- **Enrollment continues on A15**

Despite snag, pop-up club says shows will go on

By St. John BARNED-SMITH

Two days before Taylor Swift and Bruno Mars take the stage in Houston, the pop-up club hosting the Super Bowl Week concerts still has not obtained a certificate of occupancy needed for the expected crush of revelers.

Failure to obtain the cer-

tificate would scuttle the high-profile productions set to begin Thursday at Club Nomadic, a portable venue capable of holding up to 9,000 concert-goers each night in the days leading up to Super Bowl LI.

As of late Tuesday, the club's representatives still had several permits and inspec-

tions to wade through, sending city officials scrambling to make sure the high-profile events stayed on track while meeting city safety regulations.

"The City of Houston is working 24/7 to make sure venues for Super Bowl 51, like Club Nomadic, are safe and **Club continues on A14**

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» You'll need a game plan to avoid Super Bowl traffic. **Page A3**

» From Midtown to NRG Park, workers are scrambling to finish projects. **Page A3**

» Law enforcement officials to remain on high alert through the game. **Page A4**

CITY | STATE

Katy teen in limbo

A 16-year-old Jordanian visa holder, who attends Katy High School, has been detained by immigration officials for more than three days, his family and attorney say. **PAGE A3**

BUSINESS

Perry clears hurdle

Former Gov. Rick Perry's confirmation as energy secretary clears committee as the veteran politician continues to avoid the partisan fights tying up other nominations. **PAGE B1**

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FROM THE COVER

Avenida project is nod to Houston's history

Avenida from page A1

tively undeveloped east side of downtown, the enormous white building with blue and red accents resembled a cruise ship, afloat in a sea of parking lots and empty grassy land.

Up to nine lanes of traffic separated the building from the yawning voids that surrounded it. For conventiongoers, leaving the building on foot was a daunting prospect.

Since then, though, the east side of downtown has developed enormously. Minute Maid Park opened in 2000; Toyota Center and Hilton Americas in 2003; and Discovery Green in 2008.

And also since then, Houstonians' attitudes about walking and cars have changed.

"Every time you ask Houstonians what they want, they want sidewalks. They want safe and comfortable spaces," said Jay Blazek Crossley, the former executive director of Houston Tomorrow.

That change in attitude, he said, has been a long time coming. "We have great examples — the Bayou Greenways project and the revitalization of downtown have been about making space that feels safe and comfortable, and then people use it."

Discovery Green's lure

The new plaza's opening is timed to coincide with Super Bowl LI, said McStravick, but the project began as part of Houston First's broader plans to market the George R. Brown.

Several studies had shown that to attract more convention business, the east downtown area needed more hotel rooms and a stronger sense of place. Convention-goers don't just want to spend time in a cavernous building; they want to experience life in the place they're visiting.

The obvious place to start was right across the street: The immensely popular park Discovery Green draws more than 1 million visitors a year. Could the convention center feel more connected to it?



Michael Ciaglo / Houston Chronicle

The "Wings Over Water" kinetic sculpture isn't just about birds but about migration and movement, says sculptor Joe O'Connell.

With that in mind, architectural firm WHR (now EYP) designed changes to the convention center, adding enormous, rounded windows to much of the front. "We wanted to make it more transparent, so people who are inside can see outside, but also for people in the park to look into the George R. Brown," McStravick said.

Response to the plans was promising. In 2015, the convention center used architects' renderings of Avenida to market the facility. That year they booked 29 percent more business than in 2014, McStravick said: Hotel room nights increased to 732,000.

Houston residents appreciate the plaza, too.

Jonetta Dugar of Houston said that she often brings her children to Discovery Green "because it's

free, and it's beautiful."

Her kids love the "Wings Over Water" sculpture, but she also appreciates the new plaza's outdoor seating. She opened her relatively empty tote bag: "This used to be full of Hi-C and juice boxes and snacks. (Now) we can come over here and not worry about being run over by a car."

'It's the human experience'

The project's designers began with existential questions, said Natalia Beard, a principal at the landscape firm SWA.: "How far have we come, and how much have we matured as a city in terms of understanding who we are ... our nature and our history and our urbanity?"

The design, she explained, subtly evokes the city's earliest settlers — the ones who arrived by water at Allen's Landing, or

later by trains at Union Station.

The area's flora are represented directly, with garden spaces full of native plants anchoring each end of Avenida. The curved railings that protect the gardens also serve as seating and bike racks.

An elevated stage is called "the wharf": a nod to Houston's coastal location, and also to the platforms used for offshore drilling.

The new "Wings over Water" sculpture, by artist Joe O'Connell, is said to be the largest kinetic outdoor sculpture in the world, at 30 by 60 feet.

Positioned over a reflecting pool and fountain, the self-friendly machine evokes nature: When its assembly of steel blades line up or move, it resembles a bird in flight.

Birds, Beard said, are one of the themes of Avenida's design.

The Houston region serves as a respite for flocks of migratory birds, which pause here before and after their transoceanic flights.

Even patterns in the plaza's concrete pavers are meant to resemble the ripples they'd make when they land in water.

O'Connell, the sculptor, sees a parallel between those resting birds and Houston's openness to immigrants.

"Wings over Water" isn't just about birds, he said. It's also about "the first generation getting a foothold in a modern city. It's analogous to the flight of birds with no place to rest. Widen it further, and it goes beyond class and position in society. No one is immune to that. It's the human experience."

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Steve Gonzales / Houston Chronicle

A preview event provided the media with a walk-through of Club Nomadic, which will host several musical acts this week — if it gets necessary permits.

Club Nomadic 'right up against it'

Club from page A1

ready for guests to enjoy," Janice Evans, a city spokeswoman, said in an emailed response to questions from the Chronicle.

Jack Murphy, president of Nomadic Entertainment Group, said city officials visited Tuesday and that he is confident the venue will be ready by Thursday.

"Because it's a temporary venue, we only have a certain amount of time to do our building," he said, adding that his crews would address several minor issues raised by city officials Tuesday night and that inspectors would be returning Wednesday to address remaining work and permitting issues. "This is 100 percent how it goes down. We get our certificate of occupancy the day before the event."

"In a special event environment, you're right up against it at all times," he said.

City officials said they were making every effort to get the permits approved in time, working late into the darkness Tuesday night and expecting to return again on Wednesday. "We're hopeful they'll be

able to get their inspections done," said Alanna Reed, a Public Works and Engineering spokeswoman. "If they don't have a certificate of occupancy, they might not be able to open and let people in there."

The 62,500-square-foot venue — which includes tiered mezzanines and some bar-stool seating — travels the country to host pop-up shows in various cities. In Houston, it has set up at 2121 Edwards in the Sawyer Yards arts district.

The first concert — DJ duo The Chainsmokers and country singer Sam Hunt — is set for Thursday, with Mars performing Friday and Swift on Saturday. City officials said the club initially submitted plans Nov. 30. Several revisions followed, with the final plans submitted Thursday afternoon by the organizers.

Three city agencies reviewed the plans between Thursday and Saturday before giving them the green light, and Club Nomadic's representatives picked up the plans Monday afternoon.

Electrical permits have been purchased, but ventilation/mechanical permits

still have not been purchased, city officials said.

"A Certificate of Occupancy cannot be issued until all permits have been purchased, all inspections conducted and all work approved to ensure compliance with city building codes," Evans said.

Because the temporary facility does not have sprinkler systems, the venue also must provide a person from the Houston Fire Department to serve as a "fire watch" while the building is occupied, city officials said.

"A fire watch is nothing more ... than someone who has to be vigilant to watch for fires the whole time," Houston Fire Capt. Ruy Lozano said.

Reed said sprinklers are not required for a temporary building as they would be for a permanent facility. But inspections will be needed to ensure the facility meets all safety and building regulations.

"Our inspectors are working to get it finished," Reed said. "All the players are working together to get it done."

st.john.smith@chron.com
twitter.com/stjbs