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Vote on ICE ordinance is blocked

Mayor's order limiting cooperation is against the law, city attorney rules

By Matt deGrood and Isaac Yu
STAFF WRITERS

Houston's legal department has rejected a bid from three council members to codify Mayor John Whitmire's recent executive order limiting police cooperation with federal immigration authorities, arguing that doing so would violate the law.

City Attorney Arturo Michel's decision comes after Texas Attorney General Ken Paxton renewed a lawsuit against Houston over Whitmire's executive order, arguing it violates a state law that blocks local authorities from declining to cooperate with U.S. Immigration and Customs Enforcement operations. The legal opinion also follows days of Whitmire criticizing the council's proposed ordinance, saying his executive action is sufficient.

"Our ... immigration ordinance mirrored the mayor's executive order language verbatim and would codify it into law," Council Members Alejandra Salinas, Edward Pollard and Tiffany Thomas wrote in a joint statement. "Yet the mayor's legal department has determined that council cannot even bring this ordinance to a vote."

The council members filed the measure through Proposition A, a 2023 charter amendment that lets three council members add items to the council agenda, a power otherwise reserved for the mayor.

The proposal also would force leadership at the Houston Police Department to include more details about each incident in which officers interact with ICE in quarterly reports the council directed HPD to start producing earlier this year.

Michel, in a letter explaining the decision, argued the measure would have intruded on the mayor's administrative authority as the council holds only legislative authority.

Whitmire and Michel said they could revisit the issue once incoming Attorney General Na-

ICE order continues on A5





PRIME TIME TO SHINE

ABOVE: Texans fans "Mass Mayhem" Mario Celestino and Robert Doan cheer outside Reliant Stadium as fans head to the game against the Indianapolis Colts on Thursday. **LEFT:** Texans mascot Toro rides into the stadium during a pregame pep rally.

PHOTOS BY BRETT COOMER/HOUSTON CHRONICLE

Bill raises the bar for school takeovers

Plan would require more campuses to fail, end the closure option

By Nusaiba Mizan
STAFF WRITER

A new Texas Senate bill could make it harder for the state to take over a school district, changing the law that triggered the state's intervention in Houston ISD.

The takeover trigger, passed in 2015 as an amendment, requires the Texas Education Agency to act when a single campus has five consecutive years of unacceptable ratings by closing the campus or taking over the entire district. In 2023, Houston ISD became the state's most prominent example of that intervention, with its elected board replaced with state-appointed managers. The TEA currently has intervened in eight districts, and more are at risk.

The new legislation — filed by state Sen. Molly Cook and three other Democrats — would raise the threshold from one campus to 10% of a district's campuses. In

Takeovers continues on A5

Drop in students a record for Texas

By Lawrence Mower
STAFF WRITER

Texas public schools lost 135,000 students this year, a stunning enrollment decline that amounts to the largest single-year drop in the state's history, according to preliminary data.

Texas Education Commissioner Mike Morath told the state Board of Education on Wednesday that declining birth rates were the primary reason for the drop, part of a yearslong slide that presents "mighty challenges" for superintendents across the state.

Declining birth rates are not unique to Texas — states across the nation are grappling with it. Last year, Texas lost 76,000 students, reversing enrollment gains since the start of the COVID pandemic. The numbers include students in charter schools.

"The thing that is driving the train writ large is just how many babies are born in Texas," Morath said.

But the state has also seen thousands of parents withdraw

Students continues on A5

Anthropic tops $2 trillion in record IPO

By Bernard Condon and Barbara Ortutay
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — The artificial intelligence giant Anthropic rose sharply Thursday after making the biggest public stock offering ever, at one point surpassing $2 trillion in value, despite anxiety about an AI bubble and fear that the technology threatens lives and livelihoods.

Its shares shot higher as trading began and held on to much of those gains to close up 17% at $97.17. The initial offering overtook SpaceX as the largest IPO in history.

Anthropic's initial offer of $82 per share was surprisingly high given the investor worries that ratcheted up following the ouster of AI's chief promoter, the CEO of Nvidia, in a possible Chinese spying scandal. Anthropic earlier had set a lower range between $70 and $78 per share.

"It's a big win for the tech sector after a white-knuckle time with Nvidia," said Dan Ives, a financial analyst at Yorkville Ives & Co. "The pricing shows strong demand among investors."



Seth Wenig/Associated Press

CEO Dario Amodei, center, celebrates with President Daniela Amodei, center left, and colleagues at the opening bell.

For his part, Anthropic's CEO tried to dampen worry about AI's threat to society.

"If we can show it's possible to make the right choices on safety and still build an incredibly successful company, others in our industry will be inspired to do the same," Dario Amodei said.

The San Francisco-based maker of the Claude AI tool offered 980 million shares to the public, which at the $83 per share price translated into proceeds of $81 billion.

In addition to recent market jitters, Anthropic's debut sale had to overcome fears of a regulatory crackdown next year by the Democratic-led Congress and growing anti-AI sentiment among the public. Anthropic rival OpenAI decided to postpone its initial offering until next year.

The company, trading under the ticker symbol ANT, also faces big financial challenges.

Anthropic already has taken on $6.2 billion in debt, which it acknowledges in financial filings is "substantial." Adding to the strain, the company is unprofitable, at least under standard accounting rules, suggesting that its resources to pay interest and principal are limited.

While the company showed

Anthropic continues on A6

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