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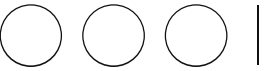
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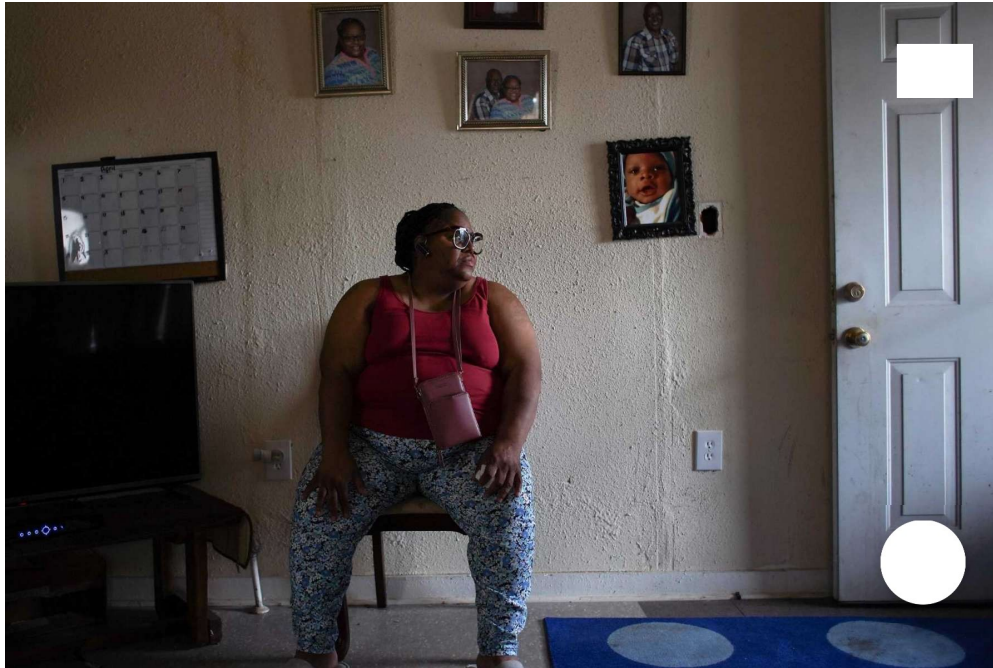
NEWS

Before winter storm, Lina Hidalgo warned of Category 5 hurricane conditions. Was she right?

Jasper Scherer, Dylan McGuinness, Staff writers

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Shonza Branch, 56, sits in her northeast Houston on Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021. Her home was heavily damage during Hurricane Harvey, and she has been unable to fully repair it. During last week's storm, she lost water and has gone without for over a week.

Elizabeth Conley, Houston Chronicle / Staff photographer

On Feb. 12, the Friday before harsh winter weather cut off power and water to millions of Texans, killed dozens of people and caused billions of dollars in damage, Harris County Judge Lina Hidalgo advised residents to prepare as if a Category 5 hurricane were on the way.

dangerous conditions outside, road closures. The same type of thing we would see in a Category 5 hurricane,” Hidalgo said at a press conference.

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Her critics were quick to paint the comparison as hyperbolic.

“Typical scare tactics,” one person wrote on

The toll of last week's winter storm still is coming into focus, but it already has become clear the damage rivals that of a major hurricane. Roughly 1.4 million customers lost power in the Houston metro area. Nearly 80 people across Texas died from hypothermia, carbon monoxide poisoning and other storm-related causes, according to an Associated Press tally as of Monday. Grocery stores, facing food shortages, imposed limits on certain items including eggs, milk and bread even days after power was restored. And a water crisis unfolded as nearly the entire Houston area — and more than 14 million people across the state — were ordered to boil their water before drinking it, even as many lacked running water or the electricity to operate their stoves.

“You think about the wind from a hurricane blowing a tree into your house,” said Jim Blackburn, co-director of Rice University’s Severe Storm Prediction, Education and Evacuation from Disasters Center. “That’s nothing different than a pipe bursting in your attic and the entire roof collapsing in on you.”

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