

Looking back: Sorting through the anxious, warp-speed '00s. CALENDAR, ARTS & BOOKS

Beck reaches out: Chief promises LAPD won't pursue immigrants' legal status. CALIFORNIA, A41

FAILURE GETS A PASS

Bar set low for a lifetime job in L.A. schools

The district often grants teachers tenure with little or no review of their skill or students' achievement.

JASON FELCH, JESSICA GARRISON AND JASON SONG

A fair Maine said he was little supervised in his first few years of teaching at North Hollywood High School that he could "easily have shown a movie in class every day and earned tenure nonetheless."

Before second-grade teacher Kimberly Patterson received tenure and the ironclad job protections it provides, she said, "my principal never set foot in my classroom while I was teaching."

And when Virgil Middle School teacher Roberto Gonzalez came up for tenure, he discovered there was no evaluation for him on file. When he inquired about it, his school hastily fixed one to district headquarters.

"I'm pretty sure it was just made up on the spot," Gonzalez said.

There is nothing to suggest these teachers didn't deserve tenure, but the district did little to ensure they were worthy.

A Times investigation found that the Los Angeles Unified School District routinely grants tenure to new teachers after cursory reviews — and sometimes none at all.

Evaluating new teachers for tenure is one of a principal's most important responsibilities. Once instructors have permanent status, they are almost never fired for performance reasons alone.

The two-year probation period, during which teachers can be fired at will, offers a singular opportunity to weed out poor performers.

It is a chance L.A. Unified all but squanders, according to interviews with more than 75 teachers and administrators.

Analyses of district data covering the last several years, and internal and independent studies. Among the findings:

• Nearly all probationary teachers receive a passing grade on evaluations. Fewer than 2% are denied tenure.

• The reviews are so lacking in rigor as to be meaningless, many instructors say. Before a teacher gets tenure, school administrators are required to conduct only a single, pre-announced classroom visit per year. About half the observations last 30 minutes or less. Principals [See Teachers, Page A16]

Democrats unite for vote on healthcare by Christmas



KYLE GREEN/ROANOKE TIMES



BRIAN VANDER BRUG/LOS ANGELES TIMES

Oh, the weather outside is . . .

After a blast of wintry weather dumped snow by the foot in much of the East, Elijah Spurrell, 4, is bundled up for a stroll in Roanoke, Va. At Will Rogers State Beach, Lori Morris spreads her towel after making a "sandman." NATION, A14

A breakthrough abortion compromise secures a 60th senator to fight off Republican filibuster attempts.

NOAM N. LEVEY AND JANET HOOK REPORTING FROM WASHINGTON

After a dramatic month of sometimes round-the-clock negotiating and deal-making, Senate Democrats came together Saturday behind sweeping healthcare legislation, providing a powerful boost for President Obama's top domestic policy goal.

The breakthrough came after Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and his lieutenants engineered a delicately crafted compromise to prevent federal funding of abortions from the same issue that nearly stopped the House from passing its healthcare bill six weeks ago.

With the deal, Nebraska Sen. Ben Nelson, a strong opponent of abortion, became the 60th and crucial last member of the Democratic caucus to line up behind the healthcare legislation.

That paved the way for Reid to introduce a final package of changes to his 2,074-page bill and file the necessary procedural motions that should allow Democrats to quash an expected series of Republican filibuster attempts over the next several days. The Senate now remains on track to pass its version of the bill by Christmas.

"Today is a major step forward for the American people," Obama said Saturday afternoon at the White House as a thick layer of snow blanketed the capital. "After a nearly century-long struggle, we are on the cusp of making healthcare reform a reality."

Republicans continued their attacks on the legislation, criticizing proposed Medicare cuts, tax increases and a host of other issues. GOP leaders vowed to try to slow the passage of the measure, saying that Democrats were attempting to push it through too quickly.

The bill is a legislative train wreck of historic proportions," Minority Leader Mitch McConnell of Kentucky said at a news conference.

No Republicans are expected to back the \$871-billion [See Healthcare, Page A22]

Comparing bills

A look at how the Senate and House versions of healthcare legislation stack up. NATION, A22

Complete Index A2
Weather Page A62

TODAY'S SECTIONS
California, Business, Sports, Calendar, Arts & Book, Travel/Imagery

Printed with 50% recycled paper, including 10% post consumer waste.



Productivity is up, workers worn down

Those still employed toil longer and harder, a boon for employers.

ALANA SEMUELS

When her Irvine office began laying off workers in a lousy economy, Deborah Hans did what every employee fearful of

being the next one booted is doing these days: She got busy.

An executive assistant to the head of a furniture company, she became the receptionist, event planner, marketing assistant and office manager. When the catering budget got whacked, she threw on an apron and started whipping up like lime crab cocktails and curried candied skewers for sales events.

Workers like her are fueling a surge of productivity in the U.S. economy. Employee output per hour jumped 8.1% in the third quarter this year, the largest gain since the third quarter of 2003.

But these bustling laborers are also a big reason why companies won't be rushing to hire new staffers any time soon. The brutal downturn has forced firms across the economy to do

more with fewer hands; many have found they can manage just fine for the time being.

As for their workers? "I've taken on more than I would have, and it makes me tired and stressed," said Haas, 40, of Long Beach.

The nation's unemployed aren't the only ones struggling in a sluggish economy. For those still on the job, life is no [See Economy, Page A14]

Man's lack of sight lets women be heard

BORZOI DARAGAH REPORTING FROM SHIRAZ, IRAN

Every Friday, the young women gather at the blind man's home in a fading district of a sleepy city once famous for its poets and wine. They unpack vessels of wood, string and stretched hides. They cradle them in their arms. And as the afternoon wears on, they fill the alleysways with song.

My Bahar, my daughter, awake up!
Put on a sweet smile and stir emotions.

The song is an old one, a bittersweet melody of grief and hope about a girl, Bahar, whose name is synonymous in Persian with the season of spring.

The man with the shock of white hair and dark sunglasses leads the orchestra of violins, santurs and drums from the front of the parlor.

All Jafarian will never see the finely embroidered head scarves or the ecstatic smiles of the 30 or so women assembled before him. But he hears every note and beat and giggle.

[See Iran, Page A28]

MEXICO UNDER SIEGE

Tijuana's security chief needs all of it he can get

The officer lives with threats and plots, plus allegations of abuses.

RICHARD MAROZI REPORTING FROM TIJUANA

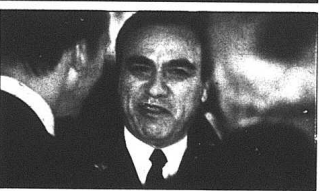
Since he took over one of the most troubled police departments in Mexico, Julian Leyzaola has slapped the face of a corpse, led shoot-'em-ups on the street and ordered suspected crooked cops to stick close to his office in downtown Tijuana — he wanted them as

human shields.

"I told them, if they try to attack me in my office, you'll be right outside," Leyzaola said. "The first ones they kill will be you."

He's not being paranoid. Since he launched a crackdown on organized crime and police corruption two years ago, Leyzaola has survived at least four assassination plots, including the latest threat to blow up his headquarters. On police radio frequencies, crime bosses taunt Leyzaola, saying there's one easy way to stop the mayhem: Resist.

"Of course I won't," Ley-



DON BARTLETT/LOS ANGELES TIMES

'IRON HAND': Julian Leyzaola, Tijuana's top police officer, restored some normalcy, until a recent killing surge.

zaola, who was a lieutenant colonel on leave from the army when he became Tijuana's secretary of public security, said in a recent interview. "If I quit under that type of pressure, I'll feel like a part of them, an accomplice of organized crime."

Leyzaola is credited by U.S. and Mexican officials with making gains in cleaning up the department, driving out many drug traffickers and, for much of this year, returning a semblance of normalcy to [See Tijuana, Page A24]

Advertisement for Panasonic 54" Plasma Full 1080P TV. Includes text: 'The King of Big Screen', 'The Experts Agree', 'Monster Power', 'With FREE SAME DAY DELIVERY!', and a list of 7 great locations to serve you in Irvine, La Habra, La Mirada, Monrovia, Rancho Cucamonga, Van Nuys, West Los Angeles, and West Los Angeles.

Blind musician leads the way

[Iran, from Page A1] He feels the tension lurking in every rest, the passion swelling each crescendo.

So they come back, week after week, year after year, and gather round. He is part father figure, part taskmaster. He teaches and advises. They absorb and strive. And though they pursue different paths in their work and family lives, they become one when they rush in here at 3 p.m. on Fridays for rehearsal, stripping off their coats and greeting each other with exclamations and kisses.

"We have something to say in this world of art, no matter how small," says Helen Parchami, a violinist in her 20s. "The instrument is strength. It's power. It's the freedom of my soul. When I play here I feel proud of all the women here."

The story of Jafarian and his all-female band shows the power of art to transform, inspire and connect.

"Nothing can stand in the way of progress, not even blindness," Jafarian says. But it is only because he is blind that the Pars Women's Chamber Orchestra exists. Normally, most people in this traditional society would frown upon the idea of a man—a musician, no less—spending Friday afternoons with unrelated young women, even if his wife were around.



PRACTICE: All Jafarian leads young women in a weekly session at his home in Shiraz. "We have something to say in this world of art, no matter how small," says one violinist.

"Not just the authorities, but the families wouldn't have allowed their girls to come," Jafarian says. "Even my family would have given me problems."

But though his salon is a space protected from Islamic restrictions and traditional mores, outside the door there are limits. Jafarian coaches the women, but he's not allowed to attend their performances. A prized vocalist was barred by her new husband from attending practices.

Jafarian and the ladies shrug off such limitations, part of the travails that have long burdened Iran's poets and artists,

who over the centuries learned to dodge the monarch's gullotine or the cleric's *fatwa* by perfecting the art of layers.

From the time of Omar Khayyam, Iran's poets and dreamers have contended that this nation's plight couldn't be conveyed through books or numbers issued by state organs, but must emerge through the slow, sad rhythms and searing melodies of its music, the multi-layered textures of its verse and the tiny curves of its miniature paintings, which depict scenes of longing, loss, possibilities and betrayal.

"Art is both science and passion," Jafarian says. "We will do

our best to make sure this light of art stays lit in Shiraz."

The 72-year-old's once-sprightly gait is curtailed by age, and he moves in slow, measured steps, moving carefully forward with a walking stick while managing the ensemble, which plays classical or traditional Iranian songs scored for big bands decades ago.

"In these 12 years I've paid for everything myself," he says. "A chair breaks. A microphone breaks. Thirty people come into your house and eat and drink. It costs money. But I haven't gotten a penny out of this."

He smiles. "I don't know if

I'm in love or crazy."

He was a flight when he tumbled down a ladder of stairs at the family home in Tehran, crushing an eye when his head struck a ledge. Surgery to restore vision in that eye instead permanently blinded him in both. His mother enrolled him in a school for the blind where he learned to read Braille.

At first he wanted to be a sculptor, but his mother encouraged him to be a musician, where his blindness would not put him at a disadvantage.

Before long, Jafarian's career took off, and he became a fixture on the Tehran music scene in the decades before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, composing songs, playing concerts and hobnobbing with stars during those days of glamour and glitz, when elegantly coiffed and perfumed fans would pack theaters to listen to old orchestras backing singers like Marzieh, who was the first to make "My Bahar" a hit, back in the 1960s.

My daughter, my graceful budding flower.
Here comes the spring.

The revolution came. The clerics tried to abolish all but religious and martial music; Marzieh stopped singing, and like others, she eventually headed off to exile.

Jafarian became a reclusive, giving private lessons to young people in Shiraz. But as restric-

latimes.com

An audio clip of the women's orchestra performing "My Bahar" is available online.

tions on music were eased in the 1990s, he hit upon the idea of forming an orchestra.

At first he thought he would get doctors together. But the wives complained to Jafarian that their husbands already spent too much time away from home.

"I realized that the only group restricted from making music or singing was women," he says.

Over its dozen years, the group has been a big local hit, performing dozens of times here and in the capital. Their dream is to play abroad. Jafarian plays roll call. They are gorgeous, dressed in their finest. A musician has to look good, the master says. Yes, even at rehearsals.

One of the violinists approach him, tuning their instruments by a pitch-perfect ear honed over the decades. The *daf* players take their seats with their frame drums, alongside the row of musicians holding a variety of stringed instruments.

Violinist Bahareh Rajai, 30, says she left the orchestra for three years to finish her master's in architecture and get married. But she felt drawn back.

"You used to have better Fridays," her husband told her, encouraging her to rejoin the orchestra.

At one point, her husband acknowledged that he too harbored a desire to learn to sing, and signed up for private lessons with Jafarian.

"This space has a very specific feel," she says. "It's a very warm place. All the people here are friends. We look forward to every Friday."

The classical and traditional songs that the orchestra plays are widely tolerated. Both the authorities and traditionalists like Jafarian and his band agree that the biggest threat is the rap, hip-hop and cheesy electronic pop flooding satellite frequencies, eclipsing religion and tradition among youths who grove to less refined beats.

Most young Iranians would regard the songs the orchestra plays as hopelessly romantic, corny.

But for this group of women, who allowed a repressor to attend a practice, the music offers a chance to excel.

A portrait of Beethoven hangs in Jafarian's living room wall, along with a lifetime's worth of fading photographs, honorary degrees and certificates of appreciation. Jafarian's son Ardayan is also an accomplished musician and a classical record producer in Tehran.

Once Jafarian tried to schedule rehearsals for every other week, but the musicians protested, says Pouran Dokht, the maestro's 64-year-old wife and manager.

"The young get dispirited and depressed," she says. "There are family matters, social matters. But they leave here with a different outlook. You see the laughs and the joys. You see their determination, the interest."

Jafarian taps his music stand, the murmurs cease and a players come to attention. With their strong, broad backs, Jafarian's hands, they ease into song.

Bahar, my daughter! Spring is coming. With flowers bringing a smile to every face.

The percussionists' feet hit the floor as they keep count. The singer, Doris Mahmoudi, lifts her head toward the heavens and raises her hand with each crescendo.

The *daf* players hold their large, flat drums like emblems, striking them carefully with their hands, and swaying their torsos with the rhythm. The santur players twirl their mallets with their delicate wrists.

The violinists' eyes remain fixed on their notes as their bows pierce the air. The blind conductor stands motionless as his arms swing.

Mahmoudi's voice, full of joy and hope, almost obscures the song's underlying despair. The late poet Pervoyed Moshiri wrote "My Bahar" decades ago, a song that inspired the composer Farhad Fakhredini, whose teenage daughter had died of illness in the spring of her life.

Wake up! Here comes the spring.

daragahi@latimes.com
Daragahi, now in Tehran, was in Shiraz earlier this year.

Chunnel trains stranded for hours

More than 2,000 people were stuck in the cold and dark in the underwater tunnel.

JANET STOBART
REPORTING FROM
TICHBORGH, ENGLAND

Passengers who had spent the night trapped in freezing temperatures in the English Channel tunnel emerged Saturday describing "a complete nightmare" in pitch-dark unheated trains without food or water.

Four trains on the Eurostar line joining London and Paris broke down after entering the tunnel on the French coast Friday night, and a journey that was taken less than three hours turned into a cold 11- to 16-hour marathon for more than 2,000 people.

The first trickle of shivering passengers appeared Saturday morning at London's St. Pancras station and central London bus stations hungry, thirsty and angry.

Lee Godfrey, interviewed by a BBC reporter, described the ordeal as "a complete nightmare" suffered by passengers ranging from the elderly and ailing to children and pregnant women.

"We were without power. We



TIRED: Passengers wait at London's St. Pancras station's Eurostar terminal amid lengthy delays. A Eurostar spokesman said four trains halted when a change in temperature on entering the Chunnel caused the electrical systems to shut down.

ran out of water, we ran out of food, and there was very, very poor communication from staff," Godfrey said.

Others who spoke to the BBC said they had spent the night on the floor of their stranded carriages waiting in vain for assistance or even informational announcements by the crew.

Eurostar spokesmen said the breakdowns occurred when the trains, leaving freezing temperatures in France, hit the warmer, damp underwater atmosphere of the Chunnel tunnel, causing the electrical systems to seize up.

Temperatures continued to drop in Britain, and travel conditions worsened on British roads, especially the main highway from Dover, the English road terminal for the Channel tunnel, to London, where signs Saturday night warned motorists of delays of four hours or more.

A severe cold front has gripped the country for several days, causing the closure Saturday of several busy airports, including London Gatwick and Luton.

Stobart is a news assistant in The Times' London Bureau.



AFTER A COLD, DARK WAIT: A Eurostar employee comforts a distraught passenger at St. Pancras station.

He had back problems for two years. And then he came to see us.



You don't have to live with back pain.

New surgical technique requires NO cutting NO bleeding NO scarring

- BACK PAIN • LEG PAIN
- NECK PAIN • HERNIATED DISC
- STENOSIS • SCIATICA

Covered by most major medical insurance.

CALL TODAY
310.659.8498

920 S. Robertson Blvd., Los Angeles, CA 90035

"I'm glad to have my life back."
—Zhan Tu Li
New York, Los Angeles, Europe
Back Institute
Experts in Non-Traumatic Spine Surgery
backinstitute.com

WORLD BRIEFING

IRAN

Officials admit jailers killed three

After months of denials, Iran acknowledged that at least three people detained in post-election turmoil were beaten to death by their jailers.

The surprise announcement by the hard-line judiciary confirmed one of the opposition's most devastating and embarrassing claims against authorities and the elite Revolutionary Guard forces that led the crackdown after June's disputed presidential vote.

There was no immediate public reaction from the opposition, but some activists said that authorities under pressure over abuse claims were merely seeking to punish low-ranking staffers while shielding senior officials who the opposition says bear the most responsibility.

Still, the statement offered some rare vindication for the

government's critics, who had rejected earlier claims from the police and the judiciary that the deaths were caused by illnesses such as meningitis, not mistreatment.

IRAQ

Iran troops seize oil well on border

Iraq deployed troops to monitor an oil well seized by Iranian forces along the countries' disputed border, an Iranian official said as Baghdad demanded that Iran withdraw.

The diplomatic standoff began Thursday when Iranian forces reportedly crossed into Iraq and seized the well, about 200 miles southeast of Baghdad near the border in southern Maysan province.

It was a dramatic display of the occasionally tense relations between the wary neighbors. The Iranian military denied that it had violated Iraq's sovereignty. Officials said the oil well was part of Iranian territory under a 1975 agreement.

—TIMES WIRE REPORTS