

SOGGY START
Increasing clouds this morning with showers this afternoon and this evening.
Forecast, E8

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PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT

Paper-or-plastic could become a bygone option



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB THAYER

While some plastic grocery bags, like these being loaded into a tractor-trailer at the state Central Landfill, in Johnston, are collected from stores throughout Rhode Island and sold to a Virginia firm that uses them to make composite decking, others end up entangled in trees, top.

Bills before the Assembly seek to curb or ban the use of the non-biodegradable bags that are filling up the landfill and sulling the environment.

BY NATALIE GARCIA
JOURNAL ENVIRONMENT WRITER

Long provided for free, plastic bags will soon come at a price in Rhode Island if some lawmakers have their way.

State lawmakers are targeting the ubiquitous shopping bag this session, introducing legislation that would discourage the use of the disposable, petroleum-based bags.

Flimsy yet enduring, plastic bags create unsightly litter, take up space in landfills, get snarled in trees and kill marine animals that mistake them for food.

"We have more than enough garbage at the Central Landfill," said Rep. Amy Rice, D-Portsmouth. "It seems like unnecessary waste."

Rice, the sponsor of a House bill that would require stores to give a 3-cent rebate to customers who bring their own bags, said last week she was going to change the bill to include a 5-cent tax on plastic bags starting in mid-2009 and a phaseout of their use by July 1, 2010.

Senate and House lawmakers have introduced a total of four bills this year aimed at weaning Rhode Islanders off the non-biodegradable sacks that have enjoyed widespread popularity for decades and are consumed by the billions every year in the United States.

Two of the bills would require stores to offer an instant rebate to customers who

bring their own reusable bags — 3 cents per bag in the House version and 5 cents in the Senate.

After hearings on March 19, both were recommended for further study in committee.

Another House bill proposes to charge customers a penny for a bag, and another would ban them altogether.

Sen. V. Susan Sosnowski, D-South Kingstown, chairwoman of the Senate Committee on the Environment and Agriculture, said there are several areas of contention to work out before the bill would have any chance of passing — specifically, any aspect of the legislation that would put any burden on business.

"I have a very pro-business Senate envi-

SEE BAGS, A5

Lawmakers looking to overhaul higher ed

One plan would eliminate the Office of Higher Education and the Board of Governors for Higher Education; another would merge RIC and CCRI.

BY JENNIFER D. JORDAN
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

Higher-education officials and state lawmakers are fighting over who should run the \$816-million state college system, a battle that centers on leadership and money rather than educational quality.

In recent weeks, two influential lawmakers have proposed changes that would dramatically change the way the college system is run and who controls the University of Rhode Island, Rhode Island College and the Community College of Rhode Island.

Senate Finance Committee Chairman Stephen D. Alves says he plans to file legislation soon that would scrap both the Office of Higher Education and the Board of Governors for Higher Education, which he maintains are unnecessary. And earlier this month, House Finance Committee Chairman Steven M. Costantino suggested RIC and CCRI be merged to save money.

Alves said in an interview that he envisions each

SEE COLLEGES, A4

Iraqi cleric calls halt to latest clashes

Muqtada al-Sadr tells militias under his control to stop fighting government forces, but demands that his jailed followers be released.

JOURNAL WIRE REPORTS

BAGHDAD — Shiite cleric Muqtada al-Sadr ordered his followers yesterday to lay down their arms and end six days of clashes against U.S. and Iraqi forces if the government agrees to release detainees and give amnesty to Sadr's fighters, among other demands.

But after the statement, mortar attacks continued in Baghdad and Basra, and violence persisted in many pockets of the country.

Prime Minister Nouri al-Maliki welcomed al-Sadr's initiative as a "step in the right direction," and Baghdad authorities said an around-the-clock curfew here would be lifted in most areas this morning.

But Maliki's aides also vowed to press on with efforts to clear Basra of "outlaws" who have used vio-

SEE IRAQ, A6

Carcieri's Head Start comments draw fire

The governor's characterization of the federal early-education program as a wasteful failure "flies in the face of the some of the newest empirical data," says one national expert.

BY CYNTHIA NEEDHAM
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Legislators, education advocates and even the medical community are blasting Governor Carcieri for calling Head Start a "waste of money" and a "dismal failure," saying the governor was ignoring strong evidence of the success of the federal program.

Carcieri made the comments last week, barely seven months after he sent a letter to the Congress praising "the essential role that Head Start plays in providing comprehen-



"If you want empirical evidence that a program has been a dismal failure, I'd put Head Start at the top of the list. That doesn't say it can't be changed or morphed into something that could be effective, but as it is, I think it's totally ineffective."

GOVERNOR CARCIERI

sive school readiness services to children and their families."

Head Start supporters say they don't understand what prompted the governor to so strongly dismiss the merits of a program that has a proven track record of providing effective education and daycare services to disadvantaged preschool children.

The clash began Wednesday, a day when more than 300 youngsters and their teachers gathered at the State House to protest the governor's plan to eliminate 400 of 2,750 Head Start slots statewide and shift \$3.3 million in federal dollars to cover possible enrollment increases in the state's subsidized child-care program.

Addressing the protesters' concerns later that afternoon, Carcieri said the following: "Show me empirical evidence that Head

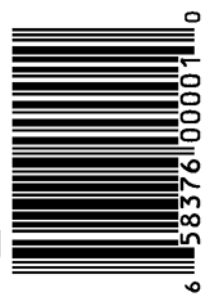
SEE HEAD START, A4

PASSAGES: DITH PRAN



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / RUBEN W. PEREZ

The photojournalist, translator and assistant to New York Times correspondent Sydney Schanberg who helped inform the world of the Khmer Rouge's brutality in Cambodia and whose ordeal inspired the film *The Killing Fields*, dies at 65. A6



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FOR SOX, SEASON STARTS WITH A BANG

If Red Sox players thought opening the season in Japan was tough, wait until they resume the regular season against the Athletics in Oakland. Beginning tomorrow night, 21 of their next 34 games will come against teams that finished 2007 with .500 records or better. B1

TO OUR READERS

Daily newsstand price now 75¢; home delivery goes up too

Starting today, the Monday through Saturday newsstand price of The Providence Journal is 75¢. A 7-day home delivery subscription is \$5 a week.

It has been 18 years since The Journal last raised the daily retail price of the paper, and four years since the daily home delivery rate has gone up.

On April 5 and 6, The Journal raises weekend (Saturday and Sunday) home delivery subscriptions to \$2.75 a week. The Sunday paper will retail for \$2.50. Sunday newsstand and Sunday home delivery prices have not gone up in 12 years.

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