

**SOME SNOW**  
Snow/rain mix ending this morning, snow showers arriving later tonight.  
**Forecast, E10**

# The Providence Journal

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## A cloud cast over State House

Word from the U.S. Attorney that there are corruption investigations against seven politicians has state lawmakers abuzz.

BY KATHERINE GREGG  
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Shudders, dread, curiosity — and what several lawmakers called sadness — permeated the State House yesterday amid warnings by the state's top federal prosecutor that the John Celona influence-peddling scandal had already spawned "active" corruption investigations against seven other politicians and seven corporations.

"Is this as extensive as Plunder Dome?" asked WPRO radio host Ron St. Pierre in a reference to the infamous Providence City Hall corruption probe that sent former Mayor Vincent A. Cianci Jr. to federal prison.

"It's bigger," U.S. Attorney Robert Clarke Corrente responded during an on-air interview yesterday morning.

On the South Side of Providence, "they want to know, 'Joe, what's going on up there?' ... And like I'm telling you, it ain't all of us. It's just a selective few," said Rep. Joseph Almeida, D-Providence, yesterday as he waited for a House Finance Committee hearing to get under way.

"If you're guilty, you've got something to

SEE REACTION, A4

## General defends his Iraq record

The departing top U.S. commander tells critical senators that he disagrees with President Bush over the number of additional troops needed.

BY DAVID S. CLOUD  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — The departing U.S. commander in Iraq defended his record yesterday against withering criticism from some Senate Republicans and said that Baghdad could be stabilized with far fewer additional troops than President Bush planned to send.

The appearance by the commander, Gen. George W. Casey Jr., before the Senate Armed Services Committee underscored the anger that dominates much congressional sentiment on Iraq as well as the tensions between the White House and the military over Mr. Bush's plan to

SEE CASEY, A5

## Boston officials defend actions

The authorities say they had no choice but to treat the blinking devices that turned out to be a TV promotion as a security threat.

BY DENISE LAVOIE and JAY LINDSAY  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

BOSTON — In nine cities across the country, blinking electronic signs displaying a profane, boxy-looking cartoon character caused barely a stir.

But in Boston, the signs — some with protruding wires — sent a wave of panic across the city, bringing out bomb squads and prompting officials to shut down highways, bridges and part of the Charles River.

Something that may have been amusing in other cities was not funny to authorities

SEE BOSTON, A4

### THE STATION NIGHTCLUB DISASTER

# Fire marshal shielded



## Grand jurors told R.I. law makes civil officials immune from liability

BY TRACY BRETON  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

When it came time for grand jurors to consider bringing criminal charges in connection with the Station nightclub fire, prosecutors submitted only three names of potential defendants for the jurors' consideration: Jeffrey and Michael Derderian, the owners of the club, and Daniel M. Biechele, the tour manager for the rock band who lit fireworks that sparked the deadly blaze.

West Warwick fire inspector Denis P. Larocque, who had inspected the nightclub several times before the fire, but had failed to cite the Derderians for the deadly polyurethane foam that lined the walls and ceiling of their club, never became a subject of the grand jury's deliberations when it came time to consider indictments.

Michael J. Healey, spokesman for Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch, told The Providence Journal yesterday that prosecutors thought it would be irresponsible and unethical to submit Larocque's name as a potential defendant because, based on their review of all the evidence and testimony, no reasonable person could find that Larocque had acted in bad faith or with malice — two necessary in-

SEE GRAND JURY, A6

## Videos, testimony offer detailed look at tragedy

BY PAUL EDWARD PARKER  
and MARK ARSENAULT  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITERS

Nearly four years after a rock band's fireworks ignited the Station nightclub, the public yesterday got its most detailed look to date at the investigation into the fire that killed 100 people and injured more than 200 others.

Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch made public more than 10,000 pages of grand jury testimony and witness statements, as well as seven videos, three of which showed the burning building and a fourth, shot by the West Warwick Police Department, showing investigators combing through the charred ruins of the nightclub.

The disclosure of material comes in response to a public records request by The Providence Journal,

SEE DOCUMENTS, A7

Stills from a video of The Station nightclub fire, shot by Steven McLaughlin and released yesterday. McLaughlin was described by the attorney general's office as a passerby.

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EXTRA: View video clips, read grand jury transcripts and witness statements, and more from the Station fire evidence release.

## This Phil proves to be a perfect fit with one R.I. family

Polly and Lee Gardner's groundhog may give the Little Compton couple a reading on when spring will arrive.

BY RICHARD SALIT  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

LITTLE COMPTON — What better way to celebrate Groundhog Day than with your very own groundhog?

That's what Polly and Lee Gardner will do when they rise early today, carry their plump pet outside in front of the news cameras and wait to see if he sees his own shadow.

So move over Punxsu-whatever-your-name-is. There's a new hog in town. He's Adamsville Phil, and at

least he's got a name you can pronounce.

He's also, well, a bit lethargic. You'll have to forgive him. After all, he's a groundhog. He's supposed to be hibernating this time of year.

"Hey, babe," Lee Gardner says one day this week while opening Phil's metal cage in the basement and reaching inside. "This is where he sleeps," he tells a visitor.

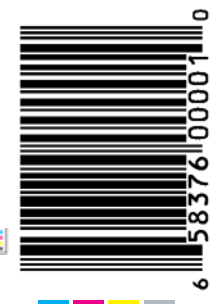
Roused from his slumber, Phil



Polly and Lee Gardner of Little Compton say their pet groundhog will be roused today at 7 a.m. to make its weather prediction. In the spring, the Gardners say they may release the animal back into the wild.

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB THAYER

SEE PHIL, B6



### INSIDE TODAY

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### GLOBAL WARNING

When it's released today, a long-awaited international report by the world's leading climate scientists will say that global warming is an existing and worsening man-made threat. **A2**

### RECORD PROFITS FOR OIL GIANT

Exxon Mobil Corp. posts the largest annual profit by a U.S. company — \$39.5 billion — topping the previous record the company itself set only a year earlier. **F1**

### NEGATIVE REACTION

Governor Carcieri's budget proposal comes under fire from groups representing state employees, cities and towns and the state's business community. **B1**



### COMING ATTRACTIONS

Five films shot in Rhode Island over the past year are in various stages of post-production work; find out when they will be opening at a theater near you. **E1**

C M Y K