

Elected officials' benefits at issue

Some state legislators are uncomfortable about accepting free health coverage, but Senate and House leaders say it is their due.

BY KATHERINE GREGG
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — For members of Rhode Island's General Assembly, whether to accept free health, vision and dental care packages worth up to \$15,404 a year—or voluntarily contribute to the premiums for those benefits—has become a political issue.

Rep. Thomas Wnfield, D-Smithfield, is one of the handful who voluntarily contribute 10 percent of their legislative pay toward the cost of their health coverage. A funeral director by trade, he explains his reason for contributing this way: "Leadership is by example, so if we are going to tell the state employees — 'here's what you are going to do' — then we need to say, 'here is what I am doing along with you. I'm no better than you.'"

But House Speaker William J. Murphy and Senate President Joseph A. Montalbano both take this position: the state Constitution entitles the part-time lawmakers to the same health benefits as full-time state employees, but says nothing about having them pay for it. "I would argue," says Montalbano, "that the vast majority of the senators I serve with put many, many hours in during the session. If you look at it on an hourly basis, it doesn't shock the conscience."

At issue are benefits that cost the state's taxpayers \$5,131.68 annually for an individual United-Healthcare plan, \$14,385.72 for family coverage, for a state lawmaker. Delta Dental costs an additional \$306 (individual) to \$856.92 (family), and a Vision Service Plan (VSP) \$76.20 (individual) to \$161.76 (family).

Together, these benefits represent \$1.39 million of the General Assembly's \$36.6-million budget this year.

Health insurance has been one of the most contentious issues in recent contract negotiations. While workers in the private sector have paid a portion of the premiums for years, only in recent years have the state's full-time employees been required to do the same.

But not the legislators.

SEE **BENEFITS, A6**

RED SOX 7, YANKEES 6



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / GLENN OSMUNDSON

Red Sox sluggers, from top left, clockwise, Manny Ramirez, J.D. Drew, Mike Lowell and Jason Varitek tie a major league record by hitting four consecutive home runs in the third inning of last night's game against the Yankees at Fenway Park. Lowell also hit a three-run homer in the seventh inning to give Boston the victory and complete a three-game sweep of New York. Complete coverage in **Sports, B1**, and on **projo.com**

Shaken, school looks for normalcy

The Virginia Tech community spends a quiet weekend with memories and memorials as it prepares to resume classes.

BY IAN URBINA AND MANNY FERNANDEZ
THE NEW YORK TIMES

BLACKSBURG, Va. — A girl in an orange and maroon bikini basked in the sun less than 20 feet from the dorm in which one of the worst massacres in American history had begun.

A group of international students gathered for dinner downtown to escape a campus emptied as many of their American classmates went home to try to heal with the aid of family.

Lawmakers push to align state, federal background checks of gun buyers. **A2**

A mother lathered suntan lotion on her toddler as they watched a college baseball game only blocks from where students crowded around a coffin and struggled to find the right way to talk about a dead friend.

"She was a great person," said a young man named Chris about Austin Michelle Cloyd, a freshman killed during French class. "She is a great person," he said, resting his thought. Virginia Tech was quiet, sunny, sad and playful this weekend. On parts of campus, a hush fell as most campus administrators, professors and journalists cleared off campus, leaving behind an awkward mix of painful reminders and signs of the struggle to return to normalcy.

Norris Hall, where 30 of the 32 killings

SEE **COLLEGE, A5**

Minority in Iraq target of massacre

The murder of 23 members of a little known religious sect is the latest example of growing religious intolerance in the country.

BY KARIN BRULLIARD
THE WASHINGTON POST

BAGHDAD, Iraq — The bad blood began to rise a few months ago in northern Iraq with the kind of interfaith love so reviled by Iraq's religious extremists: A Muslim woman eloped with a member of a tiny religious sect called Yazidi.

It erupted in a massacre yesterday, police said, when Sunni gunmen in Mosul hijacked a busload of mostly Yazidi workers from a nearby town and shot and killed 23 of them, one by one.

The mass murder was the latest attack on religious minorities in Iraq, where human-rights groups say Christians, Jews and members of other smaller sects are often killed, persecuted or forced to convert by Muslim extremists. Last month in Kirkuk, two elderly Chaldean Catholic nuns were killed by armed men who stormed into their house as they slept.

But police said yesterday that the Mosul killings appeared to be rooted not just in religious differences, but also in revenge. Four months ago, the Muslim woman eloped with the Yazidi man, who was from Shikhan, a Yazidi-majority village outside Mosul, said Mohammed Abdul Aziz al-Jabouri, the city's deputy police chief in Mosul. Muslims responded by torching some Yazidi homes in Shikhan, he said.

SEE **IRAQ, A4**

Sunday: A perfect day to apply for a passport

Some of those taking advantage of the unusual opportunity at 15 area post offices had no specific travel plans.

BY FELICE J. FREYER
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Delores D'Agostino and Betty Farrell, both 63, have been friends for 55 years. They've taken many trips together, and now they're planning to visit the Yucatan Peninsula in January.

So, after leaving a St. Mary Academy reunion breakfast yesterday, D'Agostino, of Warwick, and Farrell, of Rumford, headed to the central post office on Corliss Street — to apply for a passport, the fourth for each.

In the past they wouldn't have needed a passport for this trip. Nor would they have been able to apply for one



Filling out forms at the central post office on Corliss Street in Providence yesterday are, from right, Ruth Conley, of North Providence, Fred Garrihy, of Bristol, and Roger and Donna Pennine, of Providence.

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / KRIS CRAIG

on a Sunday. But yesterday, to accommodate travelers who are subject to new passport rules, 15 post offices in Rhode Island and Southeastern Massachusetts were open to accept passport applica-

tions. The main post office is always open on Sunday, but not the passport window. The other post offices are usually

SEE **PASSPORT, A8**



Kelli-Lynne Brown, 12, of Warwick, prepares to introduce Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse at the Cranston Senior Center yesterday.

Amid talk on environment, Whitehouse hears war fears

The Democratic senator drew about 100 people to a "community dinner" at the Cranston Senior Center.

BY EDWARD FITZPATRICK
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

CRANSTON — On Earth Day, Sen. Sheldon Whitehouse told a crowd in Cranston that he and other members of the Senate's Democratic majority are taking global warming a lot more seriously than their Republican predecessors.

The newly elected Democrat yesterday noted that under the GOP majority, the chairman of the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee was Sen. James M. Inhofe, R-Okla., who called the threat of cata-

strophic global warming the "greatest hoax ever perpetrated on the American people."

"Well, you can't find one in 500 scientists that would agree with that," Whitehouse said. "There is real consensus that we need to change things."

Now that Democrats have the majority, "Inhofe is out," and Sen. Barbara Boxer, D-Calif., is in as chairwoman of the Environment and Public Works Committee, Whitehouse said.

SEE **DINNER, A8**

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SEAFOOD PRICES SKY-HIGH

Fresh seafood prices in general and lobster prices in particular are near record highs, due in part to recent coastal storms and regulations limiting fishermen's time at sea. **A10**

MURDER APPEAL DENIED

An Exeter man's infatuation with a Providence stripper eventually cost him his life; now his killer's appeal has been rejected by the Rhode Island Supreme Court. **C1**

FRANCE FACES A CHOICE



Conservative Nicolas Sarkozy, left, and Socialist Segolene Royal, right, advance to a runoff in France's presidential election, presenting voters with a fundamental left-right choice. **A2**