

BELOW AVERAGE
Colder than usual for this time of year today; showers late tonight.
Forecast, E12

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Economic slowdown predicted

The housing and mortgage crisis may deepen but the chairman of the Federal Reserve doubts that the nation's economy will slip into recession.

BY EDMUND L. ANDREWS
THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — Ben S. Bernanke, chairman of the Federal Reserve, told Congress yesterday that the economy is going to get worse before it gets better, a message that got a chilly reception from both Wall Street and politicians.

On a day when stock prices swung wildly, the dollar hit another new low against the euro and further signs emerged from retailers that consumers are growing more cautious about spending, Bernanke warned that the economy is about to "slow noticeably" as the housing market continues to spiral downward and financial institutions tighten up on lending.

Bernanke offered no signal that the central bank might soften the blow by lowering interest rates for a third time this year at its next policy meeting on Dec. 11.

Testifying before the Joint Economic Committee, the Fed chairman said that the two rate cuts in September and last month should be enough to keep the economy from slipping into a recession. Without being specific, he reinforced statements by other Fed policymakers that the economy would have to show signs of stalling out entirely before they would reduce rates again.

Asked if he saw any risks of a recession, Bernanke demurred. "We have not calculated the probability of

SEE **ECONOMY, A4**

Parents, teachers urge Regents to spare special-ed

Removing the limit on class size is one of the most controversial measures under consideration.

BY ALISHA A. PINA
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — As the parent of a child with special needs, Peter McWalters, the state education commissioner, says he understands the fear that parents in similar situations undergo at the thought of their child's classroom being disrupted or the number of students increased.

He also knows parents can also be the most powerful advocates for their children and witnessed that last night at a hearing by the state Board of Regents. After an initial hearing on Wednesday attended by nearly 400 people, a second hearing was held last night to discuss 11 proposed changes in special-education regulations. Nearly 100 people turned out for last night's session.

State officials first considered changing the regulations in the fall of 2006. The regents plan to vote on the changes later this year. New federal requirements man-

SEE **HEARING, A4**

The attorney general's office releases additional evidence gathered in connection with the the Station nightclub fire.



WASHINGTON (COVENTRY) FIRE DEPT.

Evidence released yesterday by the attorney general's office includes this picture of the Station fire. Also released was an account by a witness who said Great White manager Dan Biechele did not immediately grasp the danger of the fire after it began.

Filling in some blanks

While the material released yesterday offers no startling revelations, it does include a chilling account of the moments when the blaze started.

BY MARK ARSENAULT, PAUL EDWARD PARKER and TOM MOONEY
JOURNAL STAFF WRITERS

PROVIDENCE — Nearly five years after The Station nightclub burned down and killed 100 people, the attorney general's office has released its list of 458 people who were inside the club for a concert by the band Great White when it caught fire.

The number of occupants, close to a Providence Journal tally of 443 and collected through hundreds of interviews, is above the club's maximum occupancy of 404. The list of names was tucked among mounds of Station-related evidence released yesterday by Attorney General Patrick C. Lynch, enough material to fill 45 computer CDs.

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YOUR TURN: With all the evidence released, what questions would you still like to have answered? To respond, and for our full report on the Station fire and its aftermath, go to projo.com

The public release of evidence followed a Providence Journal request under the Rhode Island Access to Public Records Act; it is the fourth evidence release in the Station case, and expected to be the last. In total, the Station evidence opened to the public consists of more than 34,000 documents, nearly 3,000 photographs and 100 hours of digital audio and video files, enough material to fill 242 CDs.

"Thousands of staff hours" went into reviewing the material before release, Lynch said in a statement. Personal information in the files, such as home numbers, addresses and Social Security numbers were blacked out by hand.

Within minutes of the Feb. 20, 2003, fire at the old wooden roadhouse in West Warwick, prosecutors began collecting evidence, building a case that club owners Michael and Jeffrey Derderian had soundproofed their club with flammable packing foam in violation of the state fire code,

SEE **STATION, A7**

Remaining questions

The attorney general's office has now released 34,367 documents, 2,993 photos and more than 100 hours of audio and video recordings. Yet some questions remain unanswered, among them:

- Who knew about Great White's plans to use pyrotechnics, which ignited the flammable foam around the stage, starting the fire?
- Who gave permission, if anyone, for the band to use the pyrotechnics?
- Why did West Warwick Fire Marshal Denis P. Larocque increase The Station nightclub's capacity?
- Why did Larocque, well-trained in the fields of fire safety and prevention, miss the flammable foam in an annual inspection of the club?

AFTER A WEEK OF WAITING, ROUTE 195 TRAFFIC ALMOST BACK TO NORMAL

State Transportation Director Jerome F. Williams says a new East Side entrance ramp that will open this afternoon should further ease congestion.

BY BRUCE LANDIS
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — State Transportation Director Jerome F. Williams said yesterday that his agency had reduced the traffic jams that have plagued the evening commute eastward from the city to almost the usual level of delay.

Williams also said that the opening of a new entrance ramp on the city's East Side that is intended to improve the situation has been moved up again, to this afternoon. DOT engineers said that change could remove 1,000 vehicles per hour during peak traffic from the section of Route 195 where the traffic jams begin.

Williams said his agency has achieved a dramatic improvement in the massive traffic problems that began Monday evening, and suggested that drivers can expect a further, immediate improvement this evening, when the new ramp starts si-

SEE **ROUTE 195, A7**

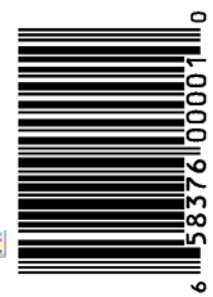
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YOUR TURN: Jerome F. Williams, director of the state Department of Transportation, will participate in an online chat with projo.com readers at noon today. Readers can submit questions to Williams about the opening of the Iway and the department's efforts to improve the flow of traffic. To submit questions in advance, go to projo.com/chat



Traffic from the new Iway bridge speeds by at right, past the new ramp at left that will open this afternoon from South Main Street and India Street.

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ANDREW DICKERMAN



INSIDE TODAY

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A DEFEAT FOR BUSH

The Senate deals President Bush the first veto override of his presidency, adopting into law a \$23.2-billion water-resources bill that authorizes a host of popular projects across the country. **A2**

A VICTORY FOR BUSH

Michael Bush's, nominee for attorney general, Michael Mukasey, narrowly wins Senate confirmation despite Mukasey's refusal to equate the interrogation technique known as waterboarding, which is sometimes used on terrorism suspects, with torture. **A2**



PAKISTAN ON THE BRINK

Pakistan President Gen. Pervez Musharraf bows to protesters' demands and sets a date for parliamentary elections but former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto still plans to lead a rally today opposing the president's imposition of emergency rule. **A2**

AN UNLIKELY MATCHUP

When Bishop Hendricken's and St. Raphael's football teams meet tonight to decide the Interscholastic League Division I regular season title, it will truly be a Goliath vs. David confrontation. **C1**

