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In visit to Iraq, Carcieri sees success and challenges

The governor — visiting as part of a delegation — says he's impressed by the morale of Rhode Island Guardsmen.

BY SCOTT MACKAY
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Governor Carcieri said yesterday that U.S. troops are making military progress toward a safer Iraq, but that political reconciliation among the war-torn country's factions is a

"huge challenge."

Carcieri, on his first trip to Iraq, visited with Rhode Island National Guard troops, met with military and diplomatic officials and had dinner with Gen. David Petraeus. He was part of a delegation with two other governors, Bill Ritter of Colorado and Michael Rounds of South Dakota.

He said he was impressed with the mission and morale of the 169th Military Police unit of the R.I. National Guard that he met in Ramadi. "They are out there us-

41 killed in three car bombs in southern Iraq. **Story, A4**

ing their skills," said Carcieri, whose remarks came in a conference call yesterday afternoon with Rhode Island reporters.

After meeting with troops, Carcieri said their mood is "cautiously optimistic."

Violence appears to be down and U.S. troops are gaining the cooperation of Iraqis who want peace, Carcieri said. He said Iraqi

citizens have become allies of the American forces and local "neighborhood watch groups." The Marines in Ramadi, Carcieri said, "are actually holding a 5k road race."

"I think the surge has been very successful," in tamping down violence, said Carcieri. Iraqis "are beginning to work with our people."

Before leaving Iraq, the delegation of governors met with



Gen. David Petraeus, commander of U.S. troops in Iraq, left, shakes hands with Governor Carcieri on Tuesday.

AP / LORI JEWEL

SEE **CARCIERI, A2**

COST-CUTTING IDEA



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / CONNIE GROSCH

House Minority Leader Robert Watson listens as House Finance Committee Chairman Steven Costantino, on monitor, unveils a plan that would create a health and human-service agency. At right is Michael Cronan, the governor's legislative director.

New agency proposed

House Finance Committee Chairman Steven M. Costantino says the state can save money by merging five health and welfare departments.

BY KATHERINE GREGG
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Lawmakers sparred among themselves yesterday over the General Assembly's own spending, after House Finance Chairman Steven M. Costantino proposed a government "restructuring" plan that would eliminate the jobs of five Cabinet-level directors in the Carcieri administration who make between \$95,387 and \$134,975 a year.

Costantino wants to merge into one mega-agency the five separate state agencies that provide financial aid and a variety of other services to the young, the old, the poor, the

SEE **PROPOSAL, A2**



Barbara Torres, left, a mother of four from Providence, and union president Lucie Burdick wait to speak about a proposal that would cut the number of people eligible for Rite Care. **Story, A2**

THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BILL MURPHY

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Your turn: How would you solve the state's budget problems? To respond, go to **projo.com**

Deal seen as insurer fires 4 executives

Blue Cross & Blue Shield has not been charged, but is under investigation in a long-running probe of State House corruption.

BY MIKE STANTON
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

A Christmastime purge at Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island is the harbinger of a possible deal by the health insurer with federal prosecutors in Operation Dollar Bill, the long-running State House corruption probe.

The chairman of Blue Cross, Frank J. Montanaro, confirmed to The Journal last night that Blue Cross' dismissal of four longtime executives is connected to an expected announcement, possibly today or tomorrow, by the health insurer and the U.S. Attorney's of-

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Extra: For more on Operation Dollar Bill, the wide-ranging corruption case involving at least seven politicians and seven corporations, go to **projo.com**

office in Providence.

"I understand there's going to be a press release, from both [Blue Cross and the U.S. Attorney]," said Montanaro. "But I really can't say much. There are certain things I cannot comment on until things are finalized."

Blue Cross, which has been under investigation but not charged, confirmed that two senior vice presidents, Lynne A. Urbani and Matthew T. Brannigan, and two longtime State House lobbyists,

SEE **BLUE CROSS, A14**

Arbitrator who ruled on health deal is Blue Cross chair

Frank J. Montanaro — the chairman of the Blue Cross board — was one of three arbitrators involved in the Providence firefighters' decision.

BY DANIEL BARBARISI
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Built into the latest firefighters' arbitration decision is an ironclad clause requiring the city to use Blue Cross as the health-care administrator for the city's firefighters — and one of the three arbitrators who made the ruling is Frank J. Montanaro, the chairman of Blue Cross.

Montanaro never disclosed to the neutral arbitrator or the American Arbitration Association that he is also chairman of the board of

Blue Cross & Blue Shield of Rhode Island, according to the city's arbitrator in the matter — and that amounts to a serious conflict of interest, said city officials and Vincent F. Ragosta Jr., the city-appointed arbitrator to the three-man panel.

"Certainly, from an appearance viewpoint, it stinks," Ragosta said.

The 2004-05 fiscal year arbitration decision, rendered in late October, bars the city from exploring

SEE **ARBITRATOR, A15**

Killer's profile reveals an individual highly disturbed, seeking to belong

BY ERIC GORSKI
ASSOCIATED PRESS

DENVER — Matthew Murray's world was haunted by demons.

Somehow, a child of a prominent doctor, someone who was homeschooled in a comfortable Denver suburb, evolved from would-be Christian missionary to a killer trying to rain Columbine down on the Christian world.

A family spokesman said Murray grew

up in a loving home. But other interviews and what appear to be Murray's own online ramblings portray a disturbed individual who resented his sheltered upbringing, had problems with his mother, heard voices in his head, felt rejected and abused — and yet appeared to be searching for a place to belong.

He sought refuge in everything from an

SEE **MURRAY, A10**

GOP frontrunners vow a spirited fight

Former Governors Mike Huckabee and Mitt Romney say the battle to win in Iowa is now a contest between them.

BY MICHAEL D. SHEAR and DAN BALZ
THE WASHINGTON POST

DES MOINES, Iowa — Despite barely engaging each other in a final, lackluster Republican debate here, former Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney and former Arkansas Gov. Mike Huckabee vowed yesterday to wage a spirited fight in a presidential contest that has become a test of social conser-

vative passions versus the power of money and organization.

Shortly after leaving the stage, the two men acknowledged that the year-long campaign is now a battle between them for Iowa — a state that could catapult one of them to victory in New Hampshire and the GOP presidential nomination, and spell the end for the other's candidacy.

Former Tennessee Sen. Fred

Thompson, who has struggled as a candidate, sought to nudge back into contention with one of his better performances at the debate after pledging this week to campaign "nonstop" in Iowa until the state's Jan. 3 caucuses. But overall, the debate seemed to do little to change the Romney-Huckabee dynamic in the nation's first caucuses.

Romney's personal wealth has helped finance a textbook campaign organization in this Midwestern state

SEE **DEBATE, A2**



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A total of \$7,474 has been donated this week. See latest donations on Page B3.

CHOLESTEROL LEVELS LOOK GOOD

For the first time in nearly 50 years, the average cholesterol level for U.S. adults is in the ideal range, a survey shows. **A4**

HIGHER TOLLS FOR PELL BRIDGE?

The state Turnpike and Bridge Authority says it is facing a long-term deficit of at least \$200 million but that it has no intention of selling the Pell or Mount Hope bridges. **B1**



BASKETBALL EXODUS

The best high school basketball players in Rhode Island, including South Kingstown's Erik Murphy, will not be playing in the Rhode Island Interscholastic League this winter. **C1**