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AT THE STATE HOUSE

The deficit dominates



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / CONNIE GROSCH

Senate President Joseph Montalbano, D-North Providence, right, has a few words with Senate Minority Leader Dennis Algieri, R-Westerly, as he prepares to bang the gavel.

Lawmakers return to tackle budget

BY KATHERINE GREGG, STEVE PEOPLES and CYNTHIA NEEDHAM
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island's part-time lawmakers returned to the State House yesterday, opening the New Year and the 2008 General Assembly session facing crushing budget deficits this year and next that are likely to dominate Smith Hill discussion over the next six months.

Within minutes, lawmakers in the House and Senate were introducing bills to allow round-the-clock gambling at both Newport Grand and the Twin River slot parlor and track in Lincoln, and citing the state's financial plight as a justification.

"I am extremely concerned with the state of Rhode Island as it is right now and the problems we face going into this year — far more than I've been in the other 23 years I've been here," said one of the sponsors, Sen. Paul E. Moura, D-East Providence. "There is a sense of urgency."

Yesterday's abridged afternoon meetings of the state House of Representatives and Senate were largely ceremonial, and leaders from both chambers pledged to

House Finance Committee Chairman Steven M. Costantino faces the prospect of leading the Assembly's charge against state deficits estimated at \$151 million this year and \$450 million next year.



work with each other and Governor Carcieri to close budget deficits estimated at \$151 million this year and \$450 million in the next. The catchwords of the day were "tough choices" and "courageous decisions."

"We are not here today to cast blame on anyone," House Speaker William J. Murphy, D-West Warwick, said of the huge back-to-back deficits. "The time for finger pointing is over."

He promised the House would "work

cooperatively" with the Republican governor, the Senate and the sometimes-warring factions within. He also led off the House session with a promise to "get to work early to start resolving this deficit."

"It is time for all of us to stand together and make some courageous decisions," he said in an opening-day speech. "The time for politics will come soon enough."

SEE **LAWMAKERS, A5**

Pakistani vote put off until February

The timing of the parliamentary elections, delayed after last week's assassination of former Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto, could be critical to the nation's stability.

BY JANE PERLEZ
THE NEW YORK TIMES

LAHORE, Pakistan — Parliamentary elections scheduled for next Tuesday have been postponed by the government until next month, the secretary of the Election Commission said yesterday.

The election date is expected to be announced formally today, and President Pervez Musharraf is scheduled to address the nation this evening.

The timing of the election and how the news of the delay is received could be critical to Pakistan's stability. The two main opposition parties have threatened to organize continuous protests against the government over the delay.

Members of Musharraf's faction of the Pakistan Muslim League acknowledged in the last several days that the elections could not be delayed for more than six weeks without risking fresh outbreaks of violence. "Six weeks is just about the outer limit before

Uncertainty hangs over nation like a cloud of gloom

The way forward is shrouded at every turn, from mundane details to big questions about where the country is headed.

BY SOMINI SENGUPTA
THE NEW YORK TIMES

KARACHI, Pakistan — The highway that leads from Benazir Bhutto's ancestral village to this, her hometown, is one long road of ruin. Here and there along a stretch of 200 miles lie twisted hulks of tractor-trailers, their contents spilling out on the highway, casualties of the riots that broke out after Bhutto's assassination last Thursday.

On New Year's Eve, as the last light of 2007 fell from the sky, piles of coal still smoldered on the pavement. Rotten oranges littered the road. A consignment of pickup trucks that the United States had bought for Pakistani law-enforcement officials fighting militants

SEE **PAKISTAN, A4**

SEE **GLOOM, A4**

"I could not manage to pull out my sister's son. He was screaming 'Uncle, Uncle!'"

GEORGE KARANJA, whose family had sought refuge in the church

Mob torches church in Kenya, killing refugees

Escalating violence has stoked fears of civil war in one of Africa's most stable democracies.

BY ELIZABETH A. KENNEDY and TOM ODULA
ASSOCIATED PRESS

NAIROBI, Kenya — A mob torched a church where hundreds had sought refuge yesterday, and witnesses said dozens of people — including children — were burned alive or hacked to death with ma-

chetes in ethnic violence that followed Kenya's disputed election.

The killing of up to 50 ethnic Kikuyus in the Rift Valley city of Eldoret brought the death toll from four days of rioting to more than 275, raising fears of further unrest in what has been one of Africa's most stable democracies.

The latest violence recalled scenes from the genocide in Rwanda in 1994, when more than half a million people were killed. The

SEE **KENYA, A4**

Democrats' message resonates, so who can deliver?

Voters are in no mood for a candidate who upholds the status quo or supports incremental change, polls show.

BY JONATHAN WEISMAN
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — The Democratic nomination fight once appeared to be a contest over issues: the Iraq War, Iran, universal health care and economic uncertainty. But as the candidates' positions have melded, they have found themselves agreeing that voters are ready for the changes they are all proposing — and fighting fiercely over who can deliver.

To Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton of New York, it takes experience in the policy trenches of Washington to effect the shifts in health care, economic and foreign policies that Democratic voters

are demanding. To Sen. Barack Obama of Illinois, that kind of experience is a hindrance, not a help, because exposure to the policy elites diminishes creativity and creates ties to the status quo that are not easily broken. And to former Sen. John Edwards of North Carolina, experience is beside the point: Change comes through a passion for battle.

"Iraq is still a pretty important issue for Democratic voters and caucus-goers. There's health care, the economy," said Clinton campaign communications director Howard Wolfson. "But I think it is

SEE **DEMOCRATS, A5**



AP / PAUL SANCYA

Former Sen. John Edwards, fighting to stay in the Democratic presidential fray with Senators Hillary Clinton and Barack Obama, on the campaign trail in Ames, Iowa, yesterday.

Bomber strikes mourners in Baghdad, killing 30

The first day of the new year was deadly in Iraq, with at least 40 slain nationwide.

BY RICHARD A. OPPEL JR. and QAIS MIZHER
THE NEW YORK TIMES

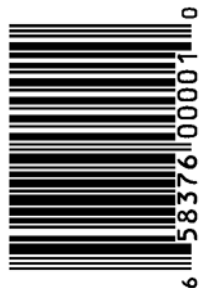
BAGHDAD — Thirty people were killed yesterday when a suicide bomber strode into a gathering of mourners at a home in eastern Baghdad and detonated an explosives-packed vest, the Interior Ministry said. It was the most brazen and deadly attack in the capital in months.

The force of the blast scattered

severed arms and legs about the site of the attack, a house where scores of friends and relatives had gathered to pay tribute to a man killed three days earlier by a car bomb in Tayaran Square in central Baghdad.

One survivor ran about the street outside screaming and crying that five of her sons had been killed. Then she collapsed, said a

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STATE CHASES TAX SCOFFLAWS

The Division of Taxation has hired a Smithfield law firm to pursue delinquent taxes from people who live in other states. **F1**

RAMS KEEPING THE BALL

URI has made a priority out of preventing turnovers this season, and the change has paid dividends. Their newfound possessiveness should be evident when they host Fairleigh Dickinson tonight at 7. **C1**



HIDDEN HORMONES

In the first such move in the nation, Pennsylvania forbids dairies that don't use synthetic growth hormone to tout that fact on milk-bottle labels, contending that such disclosure will lead consumers to believe that hormone-treated milk is unsafe. **F1**