

NOTHING SPECIAL
Partly cloudy today with
highs in the mid-40s; very
chilly tonight.
Forecast, D8

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Lower heating prices warm the hearts of Rhode Islanders

Regulators approve a 4 percent rate cut for natural-gas customers; heating-oil prices are also down sharply compared with last year.

BY TIMOTHY C. BARMANN
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

The outlook for winter heating costs is much brighter than it was just a couple of months ago, thanks to the steep decline in energy prices.

Those who can breathe the biggest sigh of relief are the people who use heating oil, which is about half as expensive as it was in July and 70 cents below the gallon price a year ago. At the cur-

rent price, a typical customer might pay \$500 less for heat this winter, compared with last year, according to calculations by The Journal.

Natural gas users will also get a break. Yesterday, the state Public Utilities Commission approved rate changes that will trim the bill of a typical National Grid heating customer by 4.1 percent, or about \$64 a year. The new rate became effective yesterday.

The PUC is also considering a proposed decrease in National Grid's electricity rates. The company's proposal would cut the bill of a typical customer by 13.7 percent, or almost \$13 a month, as of Jan. 1. The PUC is scheduled to decide the new rate later this month.

Behind these decreases has been a precipitous drop in the price of crude oil, which has tumbled 67 percent since its record high of \$147 a barrel in July. Crude futures fell again yesterday to \$49.28 a barrel on the New York Mercantile Exchange, the lowest close since May 23, 2005, Bloomberg News Service

reported.

Energy analysts have said the decline has been prompted by an economic recession in the United States, Europe and Japan. When economic growth slows, demand for energy typically falls as businesses use less fuel. Yesterday's decline came the same day that the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries, or OPEC, put off making a decision about whether to reduce crude oil production until its next meeting, on Dec. 17.

"OPEC's postponement of a decision on output, combined with the fact that

there's nothing out there to take cheer from about the economy, is sending prices lower," said Michael Fitzpatrick, vice president for energy risk management at MF Global Ltd. in New York, Bloomberg reported.

Despite these decreases, the cost of natural gas and electricity is still expected to be higher this heating season, compared with last year, according to calculations by The Journal.

A typical natural gas customer who uses 922 therms of gas a year will pay

SEE **HEAT, B4**

THE NATIONAL SECURITY TEAM



NYT / JIM WILSON

President-elect Barack Obama presents his national security team at a news conference in Chicago yesterday, including Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, nominated to be secretary of state, and Gen. Jim Jones, who will be national security adviser.

'Grave' issues await

In selecting, among others, Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton to be secretary of state, President-elect Barack Obama said that while he expects vigorous debate, he will be setting policy.

BY KAREN DEYOUNG
and MICHAEL D. SHEAR
THE WASHINGTON POST

WASHINGTON — President-elect Barack Obama's high-powered national security team, introduced yesterday at a Chicago news conference, faces the challenge of managing two wars and various ongoing foreign policy crises even as it helps the president-elect shape what he

called "a new beginning, a new dawn of American leadership" in the world.

In announcing his choices of Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, D-N.Y., to be secretary of state, Defense Secretary Robert Gates to continue in office and Ret. Marine Gen. James Jones to serve as national security adviser, Obama laid out a vision of an America whose global stature is restored and whose military, diplomat-

ic and economic power are balanced with one another and with "the power of our moral example."

But he acknowledged that "grave" and "urgent" national security issues, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, potential conflict between Pakistan and India, and economic crisis at home and abroad, require immediate attention. The challenge will be balancing those immediate priorities handed over by the Bush administration — what the Obama camp calls the "inheritance issues" — with na-

SEE **OBAMA, A3**

It's official: U.S. economy in recession

Concern that it may be longer and more severe than first thought sends stocks sharply lower.

BY EDMUND L. ANDREWS
THE NEW YORK TIMES

WASHINGTON — The U.S. economy officially sank into a recession last December, which means that the downturn is already longer than the average for all recessions since World War II, according to

More on the stock market's sharp selloff in **Business, D1**

the committee of economists responsible for dating the nation's business cycles.

In declaring that the economy has been in a downturn for almost 12 months, the private, non-profit National Bureau of Economic Research confirmed what many Americans had already

SEE **RECESSION, A6**

Agency chiefs to be quizzed over spending

BY CYNTHIA NEEDHAM
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Rhode Island lawmakers will begin grilling department heads today on how they overspent their budgets by millions of dollars, contributing to the state's \$357-million current-year deficit.

Last year, 20 of the state's 45 departments exceeded their budgets, and early projections this year show that they are on track to do the same.

"The message here is that too many agencies are overspending," said House Finance Committee Chairman Steven M. Cos-

SEE **SPENDING, A6**

State in the market for new computer center

A spokeswoman for Governor Carcieri says the state might be able to save money by consolidating its current operations in a single facility.

BY KATHERINE GREGG
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Despite a massive state deficit, the Carcieri administration is looking to buy some real estate.

In an ad that ran in yesterday's Providence Journal, the Department of Administration is seeking proposals from property owners interested in selling a 50,000- to 70,000-square-foot commercial

building "in the greater metropolitan area" to the state to be used as a new computer center. Responses are due back by Dec. 22.

Asked the rationale for seeking to buy a building when the state is struggling to pay its bills, Governor Carcieri's spokeswoman, Amy Kempe, said: "The current [information-technology] center is a for-

SEE **BUILDING, A6**

Psychiatric disorders found to be widespread among nation's youths

BY LINDSEY TANNER
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CHICAGO — Almost one in five young American adults has a personality disorder that interferes with everyday life, and even more abuse alcohol or drugs, researchers reported yesterday in the most extensive study of its kind.

The disorders include problems such as obsessive or compulsive tendencies and antisocial behavior that can sometimes lead to violence. The study also found that fewer than 25 percent of college-aged Americans with mental problems get treatment.

One expert said personality disorders may be over-diagnosed. But others said the results were not surprising since previous, less rigorous evidence has sug-

SEE **DISORDERS, A6**

Accused takes stand in child's murder trial

Prosecutors attack his credibility about what he told others happened the night that Thomas "T.J." Wright was beaten.

BY TATIANA PINA
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — Gilbert Delestre took the stand in his own defense yesterday in the Superior Court murder trial where he is accused of beating his girlfriend's 3-year-old nephew to death.

Delestre, 27, who wore a black suit and had a fresh haircut, testified that the only time he hit Thomas "T.J." Wright on Oct. 30, 2004, was when he hit him in the head as they were going

upstairs and the boy fell backward. He maintained a composed demeanor through most of his testimony.

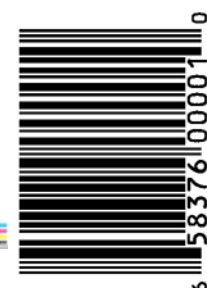
But prosecutor Scott Erickson questioned Delestre's truthfulness, saying he lied about his role in the child's death to police officers, rescue workers, his girlfriend, his girlfriend's sister, his cousin, an investigator from the Department of Children, Youth and Families, and a prison inmate.

SEE **TRIAL, B4**



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / FRIEDA SQUIRES

Gilbert Delestre, 27, who is on trial for allegedly the beating death of 3-year-old Thomas "T.J." Wright, took the stand yesterday in Providence County Superior Court.



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PASSAGES RICHARD OSTER

Richard M. Oster, a Barrington resident who rose to the top of the business world as chairman of the London-based Cookson Group PLC, dies at 73. **D1**

WHEN ROCK WAS KING

American Idol winner Taylor Hicks talks about his role as Teen Angel in the touring company of Grease, which begins its six-night run at the Providence Performing Arts Center tonight. **E1**

HOLIDAY SPIRIT

Retailers offering attractive deals appear to have succeeded in luring holiday shoppers into their stores over the Thanksgiving weekend, but at the price of their profits. **D1**

