

**DRAB DAY**  
Mostly cloudy today with highs in the low 40s; becoming colder tonight.  
**Forecast, E12**

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## Tight race may fire up R.I. voters

### Candidates spar over issues, tactics

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton and Sen. Barack Obama challenge each other's positions on health care and trade agreements in their final debate before the March 4 primaries.

BY DAVID ESPO  
ASSOCIATED PRESS

CLEVELAND — Hillary Rodham Clinton and Barack Obama clashed over trade, health care and the war in Iraq last night in a crackling debate at close quarters one week before a pivotal group of primaries.

Charges of negative campaign tactics were high on the program, too.

"Senator Obama has consistently said I would force people to have health care whether they can afford it or not," said Clinton, insisting it was not true.

Responding quickly, Obama countered that the former first lady had consistently claimed his plan "would leave 15 million people out. ... I dispute that. I think it is inaccurate," he said.

The tone was polite yet pointed, increasingly so as the 90-minute session wore on, a reflection of the stakes in a race in which Obama has won 11 straight primaries and caucuses and Clinton is in desperate need of a comeback.

The debate was the 20th of the Democratic presidential campaign, but only the third one-on-one meeting between Clinton and Obama. Falling behind in the nominating fight, Clinton had pushed for several more debates, but Obama agreed to only two, with this being the final one before voters in Ohio, Rhode Island, Texas and Vermont weigh in this Tuesday.

At one point last night, Clinton suggested that she has been the victim of unfair treatment — and that Obama has been favored by the media — because she's often put on the defensive by being asked the first question in debates.

She jokingly asked whether the media moderators might want to get Obama a pillow, drawing audience groans as she referred to a last weekend's *Saturday Night Live* television sketch lampooning how the media fawn over Obama.



Democratic presidential hopefuls Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, of New York, and Sen. Barack Obama, of Illinois, stand together before the start of a debate last night in Cleveland.

AP / MARK DUNCAN

But with fewer polling places than in past presidential primaries, some wonder if the state can handle the expected large turnout on Tuesday.

BY CYNTHIA NEEDHAM  
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Rarely has Rhode Island mattered this much.

Less than a week from now, in what some are calling the state's first relevant primary in years, record numbers of voters are expected to crowd the polls and cast presidential nomination ballots.

The state insists it is prepared with a plan to handle the surge — launching public service advertisements and asking local communities to add poll workers and voting booths — but it will have to do so with fewer polling places statewide than it had in 2004.

In the four years since the last presidential primary, cities and towns have closed more than 80 polling sites as a way of saving money in tight budget times.

It's a scenario some say could create trouble when Rhode Islanders head to the polls Tuesday, along with voters in Ohio, Texas and Vermont. In addition to voting for the candidates, Rhode Island voters will cast ballots for a total of 30 delegates — 17 Republicans and 13 Democrats.

Historically, Rhode Island's turnout in presidential primaries is low. Four years ago it was a paltry 6 percent. Usually by the time the Ocean State's primary comes around, candidates on both sides have sewn up their party's nomination.

This year, however, with the Democratic race still up for grabs, voters in the

SEE **POLLS, A4**

### Presidential primaries

#### VOTER TURNOUT

	Total	Dems	GOP	Green
2004	<b>38,428</b>	35,759	2,535	134
2000	<b>82,964</b>	46,844	36,120	
1996	<b>21,976</b>	8,752	13,224	
1992	<b>65,992</b>	50,402	15,590	
1988	<b>61,376</b>	48,959	12,417	

#### POLLING PLACES

**177** polls statewide for Tuesday's primary  
**267** polls for the 2004 presidential primary  
**565** polls statewide for 2006 general election

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FIND your polling place, check your voter registration and see sample ballots at: [www.sec.state.ri.us/vic](http://www.sec.state.ri.us/vic)

SEE **DEBATE, A4**

## Economy seen in danger of facing worst of both worlds

Inflation soars as consumer confidence and housing prices sink.

JOURNAL WIRE REPORTS

WASHINGTON — In more bad economic news, consumer confidence and home prices posted sharp declines while higher costs for such basics as food, energy and medicine left wholesale inflation rising at a pace unseen since late 1981.

The producer price index, which measures wholesale inflation, rose 1 percent last month — more than double what economists had forecast. Wholesale prices are up 7.4 percent over the past year, the Labor Department reported.

Fuel prices were a major driver of the price hikes, but prices also rose rapidly for a broad range of other items that businesses buy.

And there may be more bad news ahead.

Gasoline prices, which for months lagged behind the big run-up in the price of oil, are suddenly rising quickly, with some experts saying they could hit \$4 a gallon by spring. Diesel is hitting new records daily and oil closed at an all-time high yesterday of \$100.88 a barrel.

As yesterday, regular gasoline was selling at a nationwide average of \$3.14 a gallon, according to AAA, up from \$2.35 a year ago. The price has jumped 19 cents a gallon in two weeks.

Energy specialists predict that, as demand picks up further this spring and summer, retail prices nationally will surpass the high of \$3.23 a gallon set last Memorial Day weekend. That high fell short

Number of housing foreclosures climbing. **F1**

SEE **ECONOMY, A5**

## 'All I can say is this is a blessing'



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BOB THAYER

The brand new five-bedroom house (background) built for the Silvas on Yucatan Drive in Warwick is just fine by Matthew Silva, 12.

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EXTRA: Browse photo galleries of the makeover in progress, and read related stories, at: [projo.com/moviesandt/](http://projo.com/moviesandt/)

The Silva family of Warwick is showered with gifts after settling into their new *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* house.

BY KAREN LEE ZINER  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

WARWICK — As the Silva family prepared to spend their first night in their new "home sweet *Extreme Makeover* home," they learned yesterday that the road ahead lies strewn with further generosity.

Five free flat-screen HD TVs, two laptop computers and a year's worth of free cable from Cox Communications. Season passes to Six Flags amusement park. Furniture for the whole house from Nick, Ron and Pete at Cardi's. All the Friendly's ice cream they can eat and all the Dunkin' Donuts coffee they can drink for one year.

There's more: a \$20,000 donation in their name to Adoption Rhode Island, plus payment of the remainder of their \$200,000 mortgage from their previous home, courtesy of CVS/pharmacy. A signed architect's rendering from Blount Bennet

SEE **HOME, A5**

### INSIDE TODAY

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### CHANGE OF HEART

Minutes before a rally that had attracted thousands to the State House to protest a proposal to cut \$5.6 million from companies that provide care for Rhode Island's 3,500 developmentally disabled adults, Governor Carcieri announces that he is rescinding the plan. **B1**

### DRUG-RESISTANT TB

A dangerous form of drug-resistant tuberculosis has reached its highest levels ever, accounting for at least 5 percent of all new TB cases worldwide and 15 percent to 22 percent of cases in some countries. **A2**

### WHO'S UP FIRST?

A peek at what the Red Sox batting order may look like this season. **C1**

### A MONEY-MAKING OPPORTUNITY?



Companies possibly interested in managing the state-owned Veterans Memorial Auditorium and making it profitable tour the Providence performance facility. **F1**