

**REPEAT**  
Another day of sun, clouds and possible showers; partly cloudy tonight.  
Forecast, **E16**

# The Providence Journal

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**THURSDAY**  
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## ‘THE BEST CON MAN IN THE STATE’

— Judge Netti C. Vogel, who had already found John P. Kluth Jr. to be a habitual criminal



THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / BILL MURPHY

As some of his victims look on, including Eileen Dropkin, of Warwick, background, John P. Kluth appears in Superior Court yesterday to be sentenced to 16 years in prison for scamming scores of Rhode Islanders out of thousands of dollars.

### ‘JUST ROTTEN’



In sentencing John P. Kluth to 16 years in prison, Judge Netti C. Vogel says he was guilty of “financial elder abuse.”

### ‘A PREDATOR’

That’s how some of John P. Kluth Jr.’s victims described the scam artist who was sentenced yesterday for bilking Rhode Islanders out of thousands of dollars with his bogus tale of a broken-down lobster truck.

**BY GREGORY SMITH**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

PROVIDENCE — A Superior Court judge yesterday sentenced “the best con man in the state” to serve 16 years in prison for having swindled 30 people, mostly by pretending he needed to borrow money to fix a broken-down lobster truck.

Seven of his victims, either in court or in letters, said that being fleeced by former lobsterman and Newport native John P. Kluth Jr. had caused them to become mistrustful of others. Some

### ‘INCORRIGIBLE’

spoke of the acute embarrassment they had suffered.

Judge Netti C. Vogel declared that Kluth, who has made a career of flimflams and passing bad checks, must serve at least 14 of the 16 years before he is eligible for parole — because he is a habitual criminal.

Adopting a quip by Mark L. Smith, Kluth’s defense lawyer, Vogel labeled the defendant “the best con man in the state.” His victims, she noted, included

SEE **CON MAN, A6**

## House passes state budget

Lawmakers approve most of the major provisions in the \$6.89-billion plan with little debate, in an effort to close a \$425-million deficit.

**BY STEVE PEOPLES and CYNTHIA NEEDHAM**  
JOURNAL STATE HOUSE BUREAU

PROVIDENCE — Struggling to close a \$425-million shortfall for the budget year that begins in just two weeks, the state House of Representatives battled late into the night on the merits of a \$6.89-billion spending package that includes dramatic cuts to Rhode Island’s programs for the elderly, poor and disabled.

Nine hours after the debate began, lawmakers unanimously approved the massive plan, while resisting calls to raise taxes. They increased local education assistance for cities and towns, but cut non-education aid. And they OK’d \$90 million in cuts to the state’s work force, despite not knowing how the savings would be achieved.

SEE **BUDGET, A8**

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Extra: Get the latest from the General Assembly as it happens, at [projo.com](http://projo.com)

## Senate OKs tax deal for auction firm eyeing West Greenwich site

**BY PHILIP MARCELO and KATHERINE GREGG**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITERS

The state may offer a Canadian company more than \$12.6 million in tax relief to purchase land and build a heavy equipment auction site in West Greenwich.

The state Senate passed a bill Tuesday that would form a “public investment agreement” between the state Economic Development Corporation and Ritchie Bros. Properties, which is looking to develop a 240-acre site at the intersection of routes 95 and 102. The bill now goes to the House, which may break for the summer as soon as tomorrow.

Submitted by Sen. Kevin A. Breene, R-West Greenwich, the bill proposes that when Ritchie

SEE **AUCTION, A9**

## Hope, earth fill sandbags to hold back Mississippi

**BY DAN BARRY**  
THE NEW YORK TIMES

CANTON, Mo. — They sandbag by moonlight. The school superintendent and the judge, the police sergeant and the mechanic, the Amish man in a straw hat and the young man in a Budweiser T-shirt, they lay down sandbags as if making peace offerings to a vexed god called the Mississippi.

The only sounds on Tuesday night: the whine of all-terrain vehicles climbing up the levee to deliver more sandbags; the rustle of bags being lifted; the calling *mmm!* of those tossing bags into the air and the answering *ooo!* of those catching them in the chest; the thump of bags dropped into strategic place; and, ever so faintly, a distant *aaahhh* of rushing,

SEE **RIVER, A4**

## Foreclosures leave some tenants high and dry

**BY LYNN ARDITI**  
JOURNAL STAFF WRITER

For five days last month, Rachel Brown and her children lived in a house in Providence with no running water.

They showered, when they could, at friends’ houses. An aunt brought over water to flush their toilets. And her children did their best to conserve: the boys urinated outside.

“I used all my food stamps to go and buy water and frozen food for my kids and myself — the microwave food,” said the 33-year-old single mother. “I couldn’t cook.”

Their rental house at 23 Julian St., and the triple-decker next door at 25 Julian St., are in foreclosure. Along with a delinquent mortgage, the landlord left behind unpaid sewer bills — which, Brown learned, is why the Providence Water Supply Board shut off their water.

“They wanted us, the tenants, to pay the bill,” she said. “We just found out the

SEE **WATER, A10**

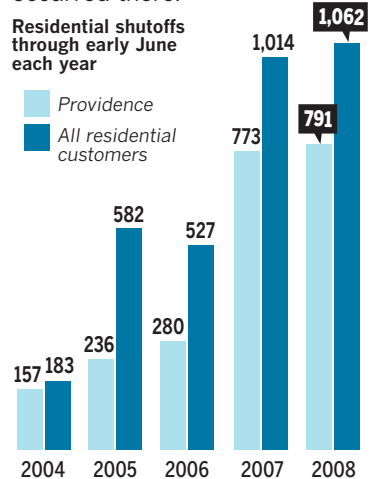


THE PROVIDENCE JOURNAL / FRIEDA SQUIRES

Patience Downey, of Providence, had her water shut off after her former landlord failed to pay a sewer bill on the foreclosed property.

### Water shutoffs

Water service terminations are on the rise, especially in Providence. This year, nearly 8 in 10 shutoffs occurred there.



SOURCE: Providence Water Supply Board

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### INSIDE TODAY

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### The Providence Journal SUMMERTIME FUND

A total of \$1,575.30 was donated last week. See the latest donations B3.

### GOLF'S COMING AND GOING



Rocco Mediate, left, who earlier this week forced U.S. Open champion Tiger Woods to a playoff, is a last-minute addition to the CVS Caremark Charity Classic at the Rhode Island Country Club, while Woods announces he will miss the rest of the golf season to undergo reconstructive knee surgery. **C1**

### OFFSHORE DRILLING AT ISSUE

Even as President Bush calls on Congress to end the 27-year moratorium on offshore oil drilling, others are asking if such a move would really lower the price of \$4-a-gallon gasoline. **A2**