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Bill would exempt local property tax

By Trip Jennings
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HARTFORD — A Waterbury homeowner could reap thousands of dollars in savings on his or her local property tax bill. The same goes for Naugatuck, Southbury or Torrington. That's the local angle on a statewide proposal floated here Thursday, which would exempt the first \$75,000 of a home's assessed value from local property taxes.

Democratic proposal's tradeoff: forfeiture of state money

But there's a catch. Every town and city in the state could offer local residential taxpayers the tax break, but they would forfeit a separate pot of state money going to municipalities each year, said Senate President Pro Tem Kevin Sullivan, D-West Hartford, who

authored the proposal.

A homestead exemption, which has been popularized in states like Florida, where the first \$25,000 of every home's assessed value is exempt, reduces homeowners' property tax burden. But in the land of steady habits,

where such a broad-based tax break is unheard of, the idea generated mixed reviews. The Connecticut Conference of Municipalities said it was "still analyzing the details of each component of the proposal, (but) the tax relief package clearly would go a

long way toward providing fiscal relief for property taxpayers across the state." Republicans, meanwhile, called it a

Please turn to 4A, BREAK

► Commission asked to raise limit for Rowland's legal defense fund. Page 3A.

Appeal of tribe weighed in Kent

BIA document could provide key, town attorney says

By Gale Courey Toensing
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KENT — The town attorney said he has learned of grounds for an appeal to the Schaghticoke Tribal Nation's federal recognition — a document he says suggests the Bureau of Indian Affairs knew the tribe did not meet all of its criteria.

Town Attorney Jeff Sienkiewicz said he saw the document from the staff of the BIA's research department in the past few days. It was on the last CD of data sent to him by the BIA, Sienkiewicz said.

"The documents said 'Should the petitioner (The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation) be acknowledged even though evidence of political influence and authority is absent or insufficient for two substantial historical periods (1820-1840 and 1892-1836) and, if so, on what grounds?'" Sienkiewicz said.

"One of the suggestions is they fill the gap by using state recognition and in another document they say this is unprecedented. I would submit that one of the questions that should be considered on the appeal is whether or not this departure from the established process is appropriate," Sienkiewicz said.

Sienkiewicz offered his opinion during a meeting Thursday night of 250 residents who gathered to discuss whether the town should appeal the tribe's federal recognition, which was granted Jan. 29. The Schaghticoke Tribal Nation has a 400-acre reservation on Schaghticoke Mountain and land claims to 2,150 acres in Kent.

The forum Thursday at Kent Center School was an opportunity for residents to voice their opinion to selectmen, who are debating whether the town should appeal. The town has until May 5 to decide.

The meeting was ongoing Thursday at press time, but the majority of residents who spoke favored an appeal. Fear was the predominant theme of the night, as residents worried about everything from the tribe building a casino to it using the reservation for

Please turn to 4A, KENT

SPAIN'S DAY OF PAIN

Terror bombs kill 192, hurt 1,400 Madrid commuters



Associated Press

Rescue workers gather bodies inside the bombed-out shell of a commuter train at Atocha train station in Madrid, Spain, on Thursday.

Basque separatists, al-Qaida group top suspects in nation's worst attack

By Mar Roman
Associated Press

MADRID, Spain — A series of bombs hidden in backpacks exploded in quick succession Thursday, blowing apart four commuter trains and killing at least 192 people and wounding more than 1,400. Spain at first blamed Basque separatists but a shadowy group claimed responsibility in the name of al-Qaida for the worst terrorist attack in Spanish history.

Panicked rush-hour commuters trampled on each other, abandoning their bags and shoes, after the first three bombs went off in one train in the Atocha station in the heart of Madrid. Seven other bombings followed on other trains.

Train cars were turned into twisted wrecks

and platforms were strewn with corpses. Cell phones rang unanswered on the bodies of the dead as frantic relatives tried to call them.

"March 11, 2004, now holds its place in the history of infamy," Prime Minister Jose Maria Aznar said.

The bombing came three days ahead of Spain's general election on Sunday. A major campaign issue was how to deal with ETA, the Basque militant group that is seeking greater autonomy.

Campaigning for the election was called off and three days of mourning were declared.

The bombings occurred exactly 2½ years

Please turn to 4A, SPAIN

Spain's 'terrorist group'

A look at ETA, the Basque group considered a terrorist group by Spain, the European Union and the United States:

► ETA is the Basque-language acronym for Basque Homeland and Freedom. The group seeks an independent nation in the three-province Basque region of northern Spain, plus neighboring Navarra and three provinces on the French side of the Pyrenees mountain border.

► ETA has claimed responsibility or was blamed for more than 800 deaths since the late 1960s.

► ETA was founded in 1959 with the aim of establishing an independent land based on Marxist principles.

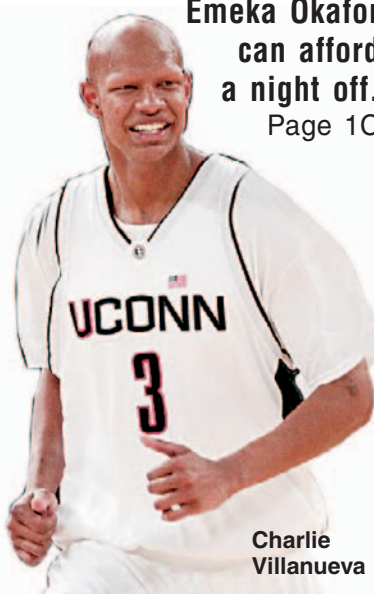
► ETA finances its activities through kidnappings, robberies, and extortion.

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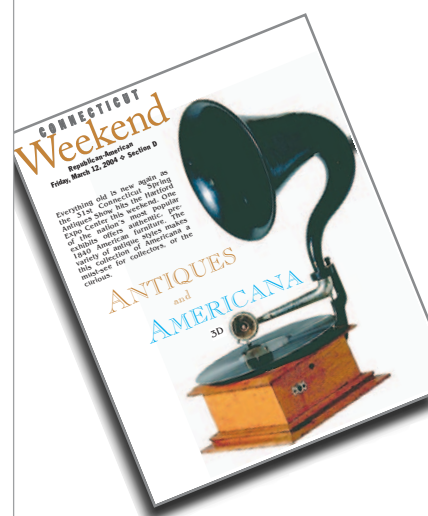
In a squeaker, Gilbert boys advance in state tournament. Page 5C

With Charlie Villanueva behind him, UConn's Emeka Okafor can afford a night off. Page 1C



Charlie Villanueva

Scientists say grandmas are responsible for big, healthy broods of grandkids. Page 2A



Antique show has something for Americana collectors or people who are just curious. In Weekend

Fallout continues from out-of-bounds show at Super Bowl. Page 6A

Gay marriage suffers setbacks in 2 states

By David Kravets
Associated Press

SAN FRANCISCO — The California Supreme Court ordered an immediate halt to same-sex weddings in San Francisco on Thursday as Massachusetts lawmakers gave preliminary approval to a constitutional amendment to ban gay marriages in the only state where they have been ruled legal.

Tearful couples were turned away at San Francisco's City Hall, where 4,161 gay couples have tied the knot in the last month.

"We were filling out the application and they told us to stop," said Art Adams, who was the first to be denied as he and partner Devin Baker sought a license. "It's heartbreaking. I don't understand why two people in love should be prevented from expressing it."

— Art Adams, the first person denied a same-sex marriage license Thursday in San Francisco

"They restored order to chaos in San Francisco."

— Joshua Carden, an attorney with the conservative Alliance Defense Fund



Associated Press

Pali Cooper, left, and Jeanne Rizzo just missed the chance to be married Thursday in San Francisco before the state's Supreme Court ordered an immediate halt to gay marriages.

strip gay couples of their court-granted right to marriage but allow civil unions.

The amendment won approval during two preliminary votes, but its final passage is far from certain. Gay marriage supporters were conducting procedural maneuvers

that could ultimately lead to the proposal's defeat.

Please turn to 14A, HALT

► State towns ask Blumenthal how to handle issue. Page 14A.

Red Sox fans can sign up for chance to pay \$100 a seat

Associated Press

BOSTON — New seats on the right-field roof at Fenway Park, complete with table service, waiters and waitresses, a full menu and some food and beverages built into the price of the ticket, will cost Red Sox fans as much as \$100.

The 192 seats, which must be bought in groups of four, matching the section's seating, went on sale at 2 p.m. Thursday on the Internet, with registration closing at 11 p.m. Monday.

Tickets are \$75 per seat for 64 home games, and \$100 a seat for 17 high-profile games against the Yankees, Dodgers, Phillies and Opening Day.

Seats above the Green Monster left-field wall went on sale last season for \$50. Those prices are expected to be announced within a week.

Meanwhile, Opening Day ticket holders who are Catholic face a dilemma: the Boston Archdiocese said since the afternoon game against the Toronto Blue Jays is on Good Friday, they must refrain from eating meat, including hot dogs, sausages and pepperoni pizza.

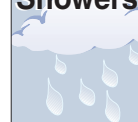
Inside

Weather

Cloudy with rain or snow; high near 40.

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