



# BELLEVILLE NEWS-DEMOCRAT

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## Divided General Assembly OKs malpractice reform bill

Legislation stirs debate; governor plans to sign it

By SCOTT WUERZ  
News-Democrat

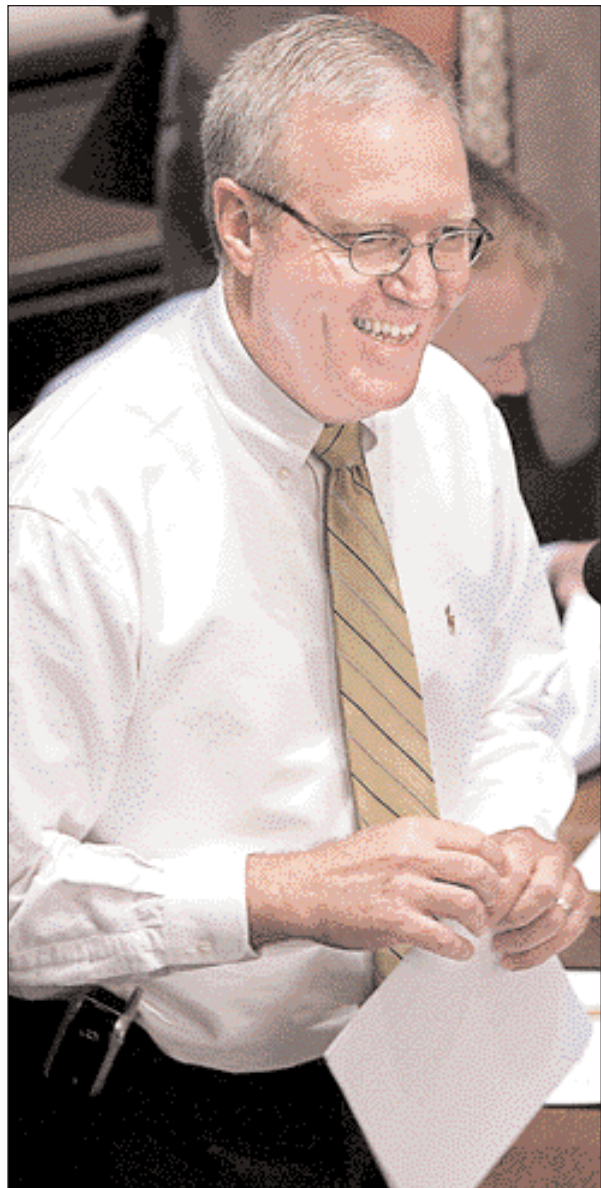
Ending two years of political gridlock, Illinois lawmakers moved to help lower doctors' medical malpractice insurance rates Monday by approving legislation to limit lawsuit awards and strengthen oversight of insurers and doctors.

After long debates filled with accusations of political pandering, the Illinois House and Senate sent the proposal to Gov. Rod Blagojevich, who has pledged to sign it.

The compromise was crafted last week by Democratic leaders working with the doctors and hospitals who have been pushing for legislative action for the last two years. The House approved 68-46 Monday afternoon, and the Senate passed it 36-22 early today, the day lawmakers are scheduled to end their legislative session.

The bill calls for malpractice judgments to be limited to \$500,000 in damages against individuals and \$1 million against hospitals, state Rep. Tom Holbrook said.

In doing so, lawmakers hope to stem the tide of doctors who have fled the state because of skyrocket-



Rep. Dan Reitz, D-Steeleville, left, pauses in a lighter moment of debate on the malpractice bill in the House, while Rep. Dan Fritchey, D-Chicago, expresses frustration when the bill he opposed was passed.

Please see MALPRACTICE, A2

## Tape: Powell figured \$5 for each voter

Vote-buying trial to begin today

By MIKE FITZGERALD  
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EAST ST. LOUIS — The leaders of the St. Clair County Democratic Central Committee relied on a simple formula to figure out how much money to pay precinct committeemen in East St. Louis to "get out the vote" in the Nov. 2 election, according to FBI summaries of audio tapes made by undercover informants.



Powell

In one FBI summary of an audio clip, which was recorded Oct. 13, ex-City Council member Charles Powell is heard discussing the formula with an informant.

"Powell explained that the amount was based on multiplying the expected number of voters in the precinct times an amount of five dollars each," according to the report, a copy of which was obtained by the News-Democrat.

The reports document FBI interviews with government witnesses in the election fraud trial

Please see POWELL, A2



STEVE NAGY/News-Democrat

American Legion Post 199 member Jim Shaul spreads sealer on the Edwardsville Legion lounge's new floor last week.

## What does the medical malpractice legislation do?

The medical malpractice legislation considered by Illinois lawmakers Monday attempts to lower doctors' malpractice insurance rates with changes to the legal system, insurance regulation and doctor discipline. Here are the highlights as reported by The Associated Press:

### Legal system

Limits awards for noneconomic damages, such as pain and suffering, that victims can win in malpractice lawsuits. Doctors would pay no more than \$500,000 and hospitals \$1 million.  
Increases standards for who qualifies as an expert in malpractice cases.  
Lets doctors apologize to victims without the apology being used against them in court.

### Insurance regulation:

Requires public hearings by state insurance regulators on proposed rate increases above 6 percent, or if enough policyholders request it.  
Makes insurers give regulators more information about how they developed their proposed rates.  
Gives state regulators more power to set and adjust rates.

### Medical discipline:

Creates a Web site with doctors' backgrounds, including education, awards, malpractice losses and criminal convictions.  
Adds two new members to the state's Medical Disciplinary Board and doubles the number of state investigators.  
Doubles the size of disciplinary fines from \$5,000 to \$10,000 per incident.

## Recycling helps environment, cuts city landfill fees

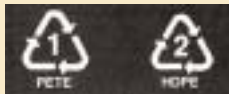
### Recycling tips

Belleville collects newspaper, glass, aluminum and tin cans, and plastic. Here are some tips for ensuring your recyclables are ready to go:

**Glass:** The city only takes clear, brown and green jars and bottles. Remove the lids and rinse.  
**Plastic:** The city only accepts plastic containers imprinted with one of these two symbols, so check the bottom first.

**Newspaper:** The city only accepts newspaper and newspaper inserts. Do not put out magazines, junk mail, office paper or other paper products.  
Place newspapers in brown paper bags or bind them with twine in 10-inch stacks. Do not put newspapers out on rainy days.

**Cans:** The city takes tin and aluminum food and drink cans. Remove lids and labels, rinse and flatten.



Soda bottles, milk jugs and juice containers usually work. Remove lids, rinse and flatten.

Source: Belleville Health and Sanitation Department

JIM MOELLER/News-Democrat

But policies can vary, depending on the town

By LISA P. WHITE  
News-Democrat

BELLEVILLE — Some people recycle to help the environment. Others do it to make a few extra bucks.

Belleville does it to ease the strain on the local landfill and to strengthen the city's bottom line.

But the city only earns between \$700 and \$900 per month on its recycling program. That's nickels and dimes in the context of a \$69 million annual budget.

"Recycling is not a money maker," said Mike Eckert, outgoing director of sanitation, housing and health. "Where you're saving money is the tipping fee."

The city pays \$31.29 per ton to dump trash at the Milam Recycling and Disposal Facility in East St. Louis. This fis-

cal year, the total landfill fee is budgeted at \$570,000.

In April, the City Council approved a \$12 increase in the annual residential trash collection fee to \$148, and \$136 for senior citizens. The city has raised the trash fee \$12 each year since 2003 to offset increases in the landfill fee.

Despite the raises, the city still does not collect enough to cover the cost of running the sanitation department, according to city finance director Nancy Boeckman.

Eckert did not know the exact cost of the recycling program, but he estimates that the three employees who pick up curbside recyclables receive a salary and benefits package equal to about \$45,000 a year apiece. Add to that \$100 per week for gasoline for three trucks and the city is paying at least \$150,000 per year.

Please see RECYCLING, A2

## Edwardsville Legion's lounge back in business

Fire had damaged building

By JENNIFER KAPIOLANI SAXTON  
News-Democrat

EDWARDSVILLE — The "On the Hill" lounge is finally open at the American Legion Post 199 nearly 10 months after fire heavily damaged the 30-year-old building.

"We're anxious to get back in the saddle," said Ron Eberhart, member and Legion park board president.

Construction crews are nearing completion of renovations on the lounge, banquet hall and members room at the American Legion building at 58 S. Illinois 157, which was nearly destroyed by a fire Aug. 15. On Dec. 5, two outbuildings also were set on fire.

The fires were believed to be arson, but no suspects have been found in the case, which is being investigated by the Edwardsville Police Department.

In January, the Legion offered a \$5,000 reward for any information toward the investigation, but no leads have come forward.

Please see LEGION, A2

### Coming Wednesday

Prepare yourself for some mouth-watering recipes and Suzanne Boyle's Stir Crazy column that appears in Lifestyle.

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### LOTTERY FOR ILLINOIS

Pick 3-Midday: 9-9-4 Pick 4-Evening: 7-9-3-3  
Pick 3-Evening: 3-2-0 Little Lotto: 05-06-17-19-37  
Pick 4-Midday: 6-2-0-3 Lotto: 04-08-14-26-43-51  
Jackpot: \$2.75 million

### FOR MISSOURI

Pick 3-Midday: 1-3-8; Evening: 8-6-8  
Pick 4-Midday: 0-4-2-8; Evening: 6-6-0-8  
Show Me 5-Midday: 2-12-13-23-43  
Show Me 5-Evening: 10-12-13-16-34

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