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opportunity

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Sports

Bulldogs win at Newton girls' season opener. ▶ B1



Tomorrow

Union Township man waxes poetic in first book.

Inside

Big fees

House panel sets fees for big firms and aims to reign in Federal Reserve.

▶ A2



On stage

Effingham area talent on stage with classic Christmas story.

▶ C1

Saturday



Leftovers

Celebrity chef Bobby Flay shares ideas for dealing with leftovers.

Weather



Mostly cloudy today. 56/42

▶ A7

In Memory

Word has been received of the following death:

Karen Ruble

▶ A5

Clarification

A story in the Daily News stated that high school students volunteered to help set up the Wonderland in Lights display in Effingham. The students volunteered to help at the display. City employees put up the display.

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House moves to protect doctors

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Democratic-controlled House voted Thursday to add more than \$200 billion to the deficit to prevent steep Medicare payment cuts to doctors, a move Republicans denounced as a political payoff.

The measure, approved on a near party-line vote of 243 to 183, is a top priority for the American Medical Association. The GOP contended that Democrats supported the bill to thank the doctors group for backing President Barack Obama's health care overhaul.

"This is nothing more than a repayment to the American Medical Association for endorsing

the larger health care bill that was on the floor several weeks ago," said Rep. Joe Barton, R-Texas.

"This is not a question of payoff to anybody," retorted Majority Leader Steny Hoyer, D-Md. "It's the right thing to do."

Characterizing the measure as "an important step forward," the president lauded the legislators "for taking action to protect the care and physician choice that Medicare beneficiaries and TRICARE patients have earned" in a statement issued by the White House late Thursday.

Doctors are facing a 21 percent reduction in Medicare reim-

bursement rates in January unless Congress acts first, the result of a flawed funding-formula that lawmakers have had to step in nearly annually to block in recent years.

The bill passed Thursday attempts a permanent fix by restructuring the payments to factor in how much doctors spend on various services, among other changes.

Past votes on the issue have been largely bipartisan, but this year the doctor payment issue has become a proxy for the larger health overhaul debate. Only one Republican voted "yes" Thursday, Rep. Michael Burgess of Texas, an obstetrician. Eleven

Democrats voted "no."

Despite intense lobbying by the AMA, the doctor payment legislation failed in the Senate last month in an embarrassing defeat, with moderate Democrats concerned about the deficit joining Republicans to bring it down. That leaves its future uncertain even though the rate cuts loom in less than two months.

AMA president Dr. James Rohack called on the Senate to act, saying the legislation is "an essential element of comprehensive health reform."

Rohack also dismissed GOP

— DOCTORS to A5 —

All together now



The Effingham High School band backs up sophomores Chelsea Bingham, left, and Shaena Traub, right, while they play their marimbas during the Effingham High School Fall Band and Chorus Concert Thursday night.

Tony Huffman photo

Illinois unemployment hits 11 percent

CHICAGO (AP) — Illinois' unemployment rate continued to climb last month, rising to its highest level in more than a quarter century, officials reported Thursday.

The Illinois Department of Employment Security reported that the seasonally adjusted unemployment rose from 10.5 percent to 11 percent between September and October, bringing the rate to its

highest mark since August 1983. As recently as October 2008, the unemployment rate was 6.8 percent.

The department said the number of jobs fell by 3,200 — making October the 21st straight month in which the number of jobs has dropped.

In all, the number of non-farm jobs in the state last month was just over 5.63 million, the lowest number since

September 1995.

But officials also said that the rate at which people have lost their jobs slowed considerably. And, while the number of jobs in the trade and transportation sector and the manufacturing sector dipped slightly, other sectors, including construction, educational and health services, and professional and business services, showed slight gains.

Maureen O'Donnell,

the department's director, said the "slowing pace of job loss and other leading economic indicators bring with it cautious optimism."

But, she said, "they are of little comfort to those seeking meaningful employment during this national recession."

Nationally, the unemployment rate increased 0.4 percent to reach 10.2 percent — the highest the rate has been since April 1993.

Glitch snarls air traffic in latest woes for FAA

ATLANTA (AP) — For the second time in a little more than a year, a glitch at one of the two centers that handle flight plans for the nation's air travel system set off delays and cancellations for passengers around the country.

The snarl Thursday — traced to something as simple as a single circuit board — prompted calls for more money and manpower at the Federal Aviation Administration, which has struggled with-out success for years to overhaul the air traffic system.

The circuit board, at an FAA center in Salt Lake City, is part of a multibillion-dollar nationwide

communications network that the agency has spent years installing as part of plans to modernize air traffic control.

A government watchdog said last year that the network was over budget and plagued by outages. On a single day in 2007 alone, the failure of parts of the network was responsible for 566 flight delays.

Aviation experts are unsure whether any system that relies on the interconnectedness of computers can prevent glitches from causing havoc unless there are sufficient backup systems to handle the thousands of flight plans filed each day in the U.S.

"A good communications system should have enough redundancy that a failure shouldn't hurt it that badly," said Michael Ball, a University of Maryland professor who specializes in aviation operations research.

Hundreds of flights were canceled or delayed from Atlanta to Houston to Phoenix after the problem began about 5 a.m. The glitch was fixed about four hours later, but scattered delays were reported throughout the day. Planes in the air were never in danger.

While the delays were not as bad as those caused by a major winter storm, passengers — already frustrated by add-

on fees for checking bags and the other hassles of everyday air travel — were miffed.

"I am sitting here at the airport for an additional three hours when I could have been sleeping in," said Angelo Adams of Atlanta, waiting for a flight to Philadelphia.

Sisters Sharon Walker and Sheila James were taking their elderly mother, Rosa Washington, to see their other sister in St. Louis. Their 9:30 a.m. flight from Atlanta was delayed until 4 p.m.

"We were going to be there for a four-day weekend, but now it's getting cut short," James said. "It's just not a good day."

Did the White House overplay job data?

WASHINGTON (AP) — The government watchdog overseeing economic stimulus spending said Thursday that, in its rush to take credit for saving hundreds of thousands of jobs, the Obama administration was overly confident in its job-counting and did not acknowledge significant errors in the figures.

Numbers released last month identified more than 640,000 jobs linked to stimulus projects around the country. Despite warning signs that the numbers were flawed, the White House said the public could have confidence in them and they proved the administration was on track save or create 3.5 million jobs by the end of next year.

Since then, tens of thousands of problems have been documented, from the substantive to the clerical. Republicans have been able to use those flaws to attack what so far is the signature domestic policy of Obama's presidency.

The criticism has resonated, even though economic data shows that overall government efforts, from President George W. Bush's bank bailout to President Barack Obama's stimulus, have improved the economy. Fewer than 1 in 10 Americans think the stimulus has created any jobs so far, according to a CBS News poll this week.

Earl Devaney, the watchdog whose Recovery Accountability and Transparency Board compiled and released the job data, said he could not certify the numbers were correct. Rep. Darrell Issa, R-Calif., asked whether the administration should have been more conservative and acknowledged it had "no idea" whether the jobs were being counted correctly.

"Wouldn't that be a fairer way to put it?" Issa said.

Russ Braunecker

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