



TOUGH CONDITIONS

Herrin, Du Quoin win team titles at a rainy SIRR girls track conference meet, **SPORTS, PAGE C1**

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Medical marijuana: A safer choice?

Illinois Senate bill would make medical marijuana an alternative to opioids

DUSTIN DUNCAN
The Southern

CARBONDALE — The Illinois Senate has passed a bill aimed at providing alternatives to opioid prescriptions.

Senate Bill 336 allows any condition for which opioids could be prescribed to the list of qualifying conditions for the state's medical cannabis program. Basically, this means individuals who might otherwise take an opioid would be eligible to use medical cannabis.

The legislation creates a pilot program that allows patients to take a physician certification to a dispensary to receive medical cannabis. Patients can participate in the program and use medical cannabis to help them transition off their initial opioid prescription, or to treat their pain without ever using opioids, according to a news release from the bill's sponsor, Don Harmon, D-Oak Park.

"We know that medical cannabis is a safe alternative treatment for the same conditions for which opioids are prescribed," Harmon said. "This legislation aims to stop dependence before it begins by providing an immediate alternative."

Dispensaries would be required to verify the physician certification and dispense

medical cannabis in set amounts based on the recommended duration of the opioid prescription. The patient would be given an endorsement card indicating that they are in lawful possession of medical cannabis.

The bill was passed by a 44-6 vote and is currently in the rules committee in the Illinois House.

Both Southern Illinois senators Dale Fowler, R-Harrisburg, and Paul Schimpf, R-Waterloo, voted in favor of the measure.

Fowler said the legislation is in response to the growing opioid crisis in the state, which has cost the lives of over 10,000 Illinoisans in the past decade alone.

"By supporting the implementation of a pilot program, lawmakers are seeking realistic solutions to a very concerning public health crisis while also ensuring that we are providing medical relief to patients who are in pain and suffering," Fowler said. "Moving forward, we should continue to seek out ways to address the escalating epidemic we are seeing with opioid usage across the nation, acknowledging that there may be other

avenues to explore that help patients deal with their pain and also recognize that opioids may not be the



"By supporting the implementation of a pilot program, lawmakers are seeking realistic solutions to a very concerning public health crisis while also ensuring that we are providing medical relief to patients who are in pain and suffering."

Illinois State Senator Dale Fowler, R-Harrisburg

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GETTY IMAGES

SIU BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Chair responds to board infighting

K. JANIS ESCH
The Southern

CARBONDALE — Southern Illinois University Board of Trustees Chair Amy Sholar is disputing recent reports of a leadership crisis within the system.

In an open letter to the SIU community, released late Wednesday afternoon, Sholar defends her support of a proposal to shift \$5.1 million in state appropriation funding from SIU Carbondale to SIU Edwardsville — a measure that failed to pass at the board's April 12 meeting.



Sholar

"I was dismayed and disappointed that some would not even entertain the idea of giving Edwardsville a chance at some of those dollars, especially after Carbondale has relied so heavily on the other campuses to keep its financial ship afloat," Sholar writes.

She argues that she brought the discussion on funding allocation before the board "in the spirit of transparency," and that the matter is not evidence of infighting.

"We have great leadership in and across the SIU System, so to me it is disingenuous to argue that our System's leadership is ineffective because one campus is struggling, especially when two of the three campuses are flourishing," she writes.

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BENTON

Pheasant's trial to begin on Tuesday

ISAAC SMITH
The Southern

BENTON — The Christopher man who is accused of murdering his wife in 2016 will face trial next week. In a Thursday pretrial conference, the state and defense appeared ready to begin jury selection Tuesday.

Brian Pheasant was arrested after Christopher police were called on Halloween night 2016 to his home, where they found Pheasant's wife, Beth Pheasant, dead. Brian Pheasant was taken into custody and arraigned Nov. 2. He was charged with two counts of murder in the first degree, and pleaded not guilty.

Thursday's proceedings were without surprises — Franklin County State's Attorney Evan Owens said the state had its case prepared. Paula Newcomb, Pheasant's defense attorney,



Pheasant

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Trump: Repayment not campaign-related

CATHERINE LUCEY, JILL COLVIN
and **JONATHAN LEMIRE**
Associated Press

WASHINGTON — President Donald Trump insisted Thursday his reimbursement of a 2016 hush payment to porn actress Stormy Daniels had nothing to do with his election campaign. But the surprise revelation of the president's payment clashed with his past statements, created new legal headaches and stunned many in the West Wing.

White House aides were blindsided when Trump's recently added attorney, Rudy Giuliani, said Wednesday night that the president had repaid Michael

Cohen for \$130,000 that was given to Daniels to keep her quiet before the 2016 election about her allegations of an affair with Trump. Giuliani's revelation, which seemed to contradict Trump's past statements, came as the president's newly configured outside legal team pursued his defense, apparently with zero coordination with the West Wing.

White House press secretary Sarah Huckabee Sanders said she first learned that Trump had repaid the hush money from Giuliani's interview on Fox News Channel's "Hannity." Staffers' phones began to buzz within

moments. Deputy press secretary Hogan Gidley, who had pre-taped an interview with Fox News earlier Wednesday evening, was suddenly summoned to return for a live interview.

While Giuliani said the payment to Daniels was "going to turn out to be perfectly legal," legal experts said the new information raised a number of questions, including whether the money represented repayment of an undisclosed loan or could be seen as reimbursement for a campaign expenditure. Either could be legally problematic.

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AP
Adult film actress Stormy Daniels, left, stands with her lawyer Michael Avenatti as she speaks April 16 outside federal court in New York.

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See more photos from SIRR girls conference track meet online

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