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## **Belleville News Democrat**

### **Send some heat to Springfield**

Pressure is useful.

When heat is applied, the pressure increases and work is performed. This principal applies regardless of party affiliation, as we have seen with local Democrats joining the fight over medical malpractice reform.

The question remains whether we have created enough steam so that the light bulbs have clicked on in the minds of state lawmakers, or whether there is just an abundance of warm, moist air wafting through the chambers of the state capitol.

This week should tell.

Legislators will likely pass a bill that attempts to reform the medical malpractice insurance and lawsuit system. The question is whether it includes a cap on awards for pain and suffering.

State Rep. Tom Holbrook's bill faces the biggest challenge, because it offers the lowest caps -- \$250,000 maximum against a doctor for any suffering. That is the new standard in Missouri, and may be the standard the metro-east needs to halt doctors from heading there.

State Sen. William Haine's bill capping doctor damages at \$500,000 may be the compromise, but no one is sure whether it will be enough to bring down malpractice insurance rates and fix the problem that cost the metro-east 136 doctors.

Another option is the Senate Democrats' new bill without caps, but with more regulation of insurance companies and doctors. It appears to be either a hollow gesture that will let lawmakers to go home and say they did "something," or a political move by Democrats who at election time can say Republicans failed to rein in insurers and act against bad doctors.

As state lawmakers evaluate these bills, politics should be the last consideration. They must ask which bill will limit the abuses that have pushed malpractice insurance rates way up? Which bill will bring competition back to the insurance industry or doctors back home?

This is a good time to turn up the heat on lawmakers. If you cannot get a doctor's appointment, are concerned about the issue impacting the 17 percent of our work force employed in the medical field or are just worried you might not make it to a St. Louis brain surgeon in time, let the state lawmakers know.