

HOWLING AT 'NEW MOON'

Stephen Whitty takes a bite out of latest 'Twilight' film. In Today.



JERSEY ON THE POTOMAC

The last in a series

He's the man with the message



ARISTIDE ECONOMOPOULOS/THE STAR-LEDGER

Since he often works from early morning until late at night, coffee is key for Rep. Frank Pallone, shown above at a breakfast fundraiser for Arizona Rep. Anne Kirkpatrick. As chairman of the health subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce panel, Pallone spoke on health care reform.

For party and state, Pallone helps give Democrats a voice

WASHINGTON — Frank Pallone lazily stretches back on the leather chair in his office, his long legs ranging forward toward his guest, an Army officer in the new crisp dress blues that emulate Civil War uniforms. It has been a long day for the congressman and weariness exaggerates his usual laid-back look.

It makes Pallone's next words surprising: "You know, I don't even want to talk to you because you make me so angry." The guest, Col. Stephen Chris-



Bob Braun
nj.com/braun

tian, the garrison commander at Fort Monmouth, blushes and, for a moment, says nothing. Then he goes on with his report as if Pallone had complimented him on his gold epaulets. There is a long history to this

moment. Over the years, Pallone and other New Jersey representatives have tried — unsuccessfully — to block Fort Monmouth's closing by the Pentagon.

Still, the incident illustrates the complexity of the congressman from the state's 6th Congressional District. He is arguably the most powerful Democrat in New Jersey's House delegation, a consequence not just of seniority but also his central role in developing the new health care reform bill and other legislation and also his leadership position with the Democratic majority — he's in charge of the party's message, the man who lines up all those floor speeches seen by C-SPAN viewers, if no one else.

Pallone also is among the hardest-working — running the health subcommittee of the House Energy and Commerce panel that, in this session alone, produced new food safety standards, extended health care for children, and developed procedures for approval of new medicines based on biological, rather than chemical, sources.

He is a founder and member of scores of disparate congressional caucuses, ranging from American Indians to Asian Indians and Armenians; a frequent fundraiser for other Democratic representatives; and he even headed Gov. Jon Corzine's unsuccessful re-election efforts in New Jersey.

SEE BRAUN, PAGE 31

Senate sets up \$849B battle

Democrats unveil health care bill with a public option

By David Lightman
MCT NEWS SERVICE

WASHINGTON — Senate Democratic leaders yesterday unveiled a sweeping \$849 billion plan to overhaul the nation's health care system, a proposal likely to trigger an epic Senate battle over how consumers will buy and maintain coverage.

The Senate could vote as early as Saturday to begin debate on the measure, which would require most people to obtain insurance and create a government-run insurance plan, or public option, starting in 2014, in which states could choose to not participate.

The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates the legislation should shave \$127 billion from the federal deficit over the next 10 years, the biggest projected savings of any major health care bill thus far.

It would bar insurers from denying coverage because of pre-existing conditions and set up exchanges, or marketplaces, where consumers could easily compare coverage and rates, and provide federal help for lower-income people to obtain policies.

Getting the 2,074-page bill approved promises to be a lengthy, arduous struggle, but an unusually optimistic Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) said, "Tonight begins the last leg of this journey we've been on for some time. ... The finish line is finally in sight."

Sixty votes are needed to begin debate on the measure, and Senate leaders said they're confident they will get the votes to proceed after talking with three wavering moderates, Ar-

SEE HEALTH, PAGE 18

Plea deal expected for Jayson Williams

By Jennifer Golson
STAR-LEDGER STAFF

Former NBA star Jayson Williams is expected to appear in court tomorrow for a plea deal in the 2002 death of a limousine driver in Hunterdon County, according to people with knowledge of the case.

Williams, 41, was facing retrial for reckless manslaughter for shooting Costas "Gus" Christofi, 55, on Feb. 14, 2002, at the estate Williams owned in Alexandria Township.

Barring any last-minute developments, the plea hearing is scheduled for tomorrow before Superior Court Judge Edward Coleman in Somerville, sources

said late last night.

The sources asked to remain anonymous, because they are not authorized to speak about the case.

Details of the plea deal could not be obtained last night, but the development comes as the state Attorney General's Office prepares to take over the case at the request of Hunterdon County Prosecutor J. Patrick Barnes.

The trial was scheduled to begin in January.

Williams has insisted Christofi's death was an accident, but the state has accused him of recklessly handling a gun that fired, killing Christofi.

He first went to trial in 2004,

and jurors acquitted him of the most serious offense, aggravated manslaughter.

They convicted him of the charges related to the attempted cover-up, and reckless manslaughter was the only charge on which they could not agree.

The development also comes shortly after the loss of his father, Elijah Joshua "E.J." Williams, who died Nov. 10 of complications from several strokes.

Williams buried his father in South Carolina on Saturday, said longtime friend Akhtar Farzaie.

"He's still at a point where he's dealing with the loss of his father, who was his best friend," Farzaie said.

IN OTHER NEWS

Shaky real estate market in N.J.

As new home building in the Northeast hit the skids last month, Garden State homeowners received fewer foreclosure notices, according to the latest state and federal statistics. Page 11.

The Greater Newark Holiday Fund

The 2009 campaign is under way and hoping to brighten the holidays for needy families. Page 32.

Nutley considers handing detention tab to parents

By Halley Bondy
FOR THE STAR-LEDGER

To save money in the district's \$59 million budget, two Nutley school board members want to stick some parents with the detention bills.

The board members, Steven Rogers and Walter Sautter, say they hope to adopt a policy by next school year that would charge parents for detention, which they estimate costs the district \$10,000 a year in overtime and maintenance fees.

"It may not seem like a lot of money, but it adds up over time," Rogers said. "Parents

need to step up to the plate and to be held responsible and accountable for their children's habitual actions."

During a board meeting last month, Rogers, who also works as a police officer in town, and Sautter, a former science teacher at Nutley High School, outlined a proposal to fine parents whose children consistently are sent to after-school detention. Rogers and Sautter have not determined the size of the fines or how to define a student who is habitually in detention.

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TODAY
Cloudy with rain likely,
mainly after noon.
High near 59°.



TONIGHT
Rain with a low
around 50°.



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