

To nail down votes, House Republicans weigh down 11th-hour changes in budget

□ Democrats complained of a secret process and the extraordinary power of Newt Gingrich.

WASHINGTON (AP) — Determined to ensure passage of their huge budget-balancing bill, House Republican leaders agreed Tuesday to boost

Medicare reimbursements for rural America and considered other late changes in Medicaid and environmental provisions.

Speaker Newt Gingrich and other GOP leaders are meeting daily with rank-and-file lawmakers nervous over numerous pieces of the seven-year package of spending reductions and tax cuts. The House plans to vote Thursday on extracting \$270 billion in savings from

Medicare, the biggest portion of the deficit-cutting bill. It will vote next Tuesday on the entire \$894 billion measure, just as the Senate debates a similar bill.

No one doubts that majority Republicans will force both measures through the House, ignoring President Clinton's veto threats. But Gingrich and his deputies may change provisions on health, labor protection, oil drilling and

other items to ensure against significant defections.

"If it changes, it's not because we're experiencing failure," House Budget Committee Chairman John Kasich, R-Ohio, said of the deficit-cutting measure. "It's because we're being reflective."

Also being worked into final form by the leaders will be reductions in farm payments and civil servants' pensions,

which House committees could complete due to bitter disputes with Republicans.

The days before a big, close vote always the best time for legislative issue demands.

"If 15 to 18 of us defect, the bill," said Rep. Douglas Bereuter, R-Kan., among the farm-state lawmakers, "is going to be a disaster. This is the only way we have to exert leverage."

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