

# Congressional leaders might act to spur deadline on Medicare bill negotiations

By David Espo  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — Talks to find a compromise on a Medicare prescription drug bill are so plagued by policy differences and personality clashes that Republican leaders are considering setting deadlines to prod bargainers toward a deal this fall.

More than two months of formal talks have yielded general agreement on items such as establishing an interim drug discount card program for Medicare clients. Even in some of these areas, however, critical details remain unresolved; for example, whether to make physician participation in a new electronic prescription program voluntary or mandatory.

Also, bargainers have yet to delve into more fundamental differences between House and Senate versions of the bill. Both are designed to provide a prescription drug benefit while injecting competition into the government's health care program for older Americans.

"We're considering setting a deadline," said Rep. Roy Blunt, R-Montana, third-ranking member of the House GOP leadership.

Asked about the possibility, Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist said that decision has not yet been made. At the same time, the Tennessee Republican added, "I could see certain benchmarks being set" to hasten compromise.

Frist said he remains committed to passage this year of a "comprehensive bill, not scaled-back," to cost \$400 billion over a decade. House Speaker Dennis Hastert, R-Ill., has told fellow Republicans he holds the same view.

At the White House, spokesman Scott McClellan said Friday that President George

W. Bush, too, wants a comprehensive bill this year.

Given the slow pace of the talks on a compromise bill, and the complaints that some lawmakers reported hearing over the summer that the legislation is not generous enough, possible alternatives are being floated.

Several cost-conscious conservatives wrote Hastert last week that if the broad compromise efforts falter, "we would sup-

**"I'd rather have a good bill, but no bill is better than a bad bill."**

— Max Baucus  
Montana Senator

port a basic drug subsidy for low-income seniors and a catastrophic coverage for middle-income seniors" rather than a "universal, unlimited" benefit for all.

While formal negotiations plod, Frist and several other top GOP senators meet regularly with Democratic Sens. Max Baucus of Montana and John Breaux of Louisiana. Thus far, they have focused on possible ground rules for a new era of competition between managed care plans and traditional Medicare.

Several sources, speaking on condition of anonymity, said options under discussion included using a blend of competitive bidding and a formula pegged to traditional Medicare to set the level of government payments for companies that establish managed care plans.

The objective, these sources said, is to set a payment level high enough to encourage

companies to offer managed care coverage, yet low enough to begin restraining the growth in Medicare's cost.

If the policy differences have yet to be fully discussed, the political gulf on Medicare has long been plain. In contrast to the Senate bill, which passed on a bipartisan vote in June, House Republicans tailored their bill to conservative specifications.

Asked recently to name the biggest hurdles blocking compromise on a final Medicare bill, Rep. John Dingell, D-Mich., responded: "Republicans, pharmaceutical houses and insurers."

The senior Democrat in Congress and longtime supporter of Medicare, Dingell has never been viewed as a likely supporter of any GOP-engineered compromise.

But a day after he spoke, a group of GOP House conservatives whose votes were critical to passing the legislation in June sent Hastert a series of conditions for their continued support.

They included a requirement that traditional Medicare compete directly with new managed care plans beginning in 2010, which many Democrats say is a deal-breaker for them.

Some Republican aides have spoken up in recent weeks about trying to fashion a final bill that would pass the House with little Democratic help, then dare Democrats to filibuster it in the Senate.

On the other hand, Frist, Grassley and other Senate Republicans have long been on record saying they want a bipartisan bill. At the last public bargaining session, Baucus warned the GOP not to exclude his party from the talks.

"I'd rather have a good bill," said Baucus, "But no bill is better than a bad bill."

# New impotency drug seizes half of new prescriptions

By Theresa Agovino  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

NEW YORK — A new market entrant, Levitra, has captured half the new prescriptions written for impotency since its launch earlier this month, thanks in part to a marketing blitz with a more "racy" take on sexual performance.

Analysts said Levitra's early success doesn't necessarily portend a major threat to Viagra's market dominance. But it signals a shift in some of the marketing of both drugs as capable of improving people's lifestyle, and not just correcting a sobering medical condition.

"The ads have much more of a consumer approach," said Winton Gibbons, an analyst for William Blair & Co. "The drugs are being treated like other consumer products in ads."

Pfizer Inc., which makes Viagra, and GlaxoSmithKline and Bayer Corp., which are co-marketing Levitra, insist the ads are designed to encourage men with erectile dysfunction to see a doctor, and not to promote recreational use. Experts say about 30 million men over 40 have erectile dysfunction.

But the ads can tell a different story. The commercial for Levitra features a sexy model trying to throw a football through a tire. Initially, he fails but then he succeeds, and is joined by a very attrac-

tive woman. The voice over says, "Sometimes you need a little help staying in the game. When it gets in the zone, it's good."

Gibbons labeled the ad "racy." Hemant Shah, an independent analyst in Warren, N.J., called it "aggressive."

Bayer spokeswoman Lara Crissey said the text was designed to appeal to men, and tie into Levitra's sponsorship of the National Football League.

"We don't feel we are making light of the condition. We are talking to men in a language they understand," Crissey said. "The ad has nothing to do with recreational use."

Levitra hit the market the first week of September. According to the research firm, ImpactRx, half the prescriptions for men who had never taken an impotency drug before were written for Levitra.

But analysts said much can happen between the doctor's office and the drug store that prevents prescriptions from turning into sales. The man may decide not to fill the prescription or his health plan may pay only for Viagra. Also, he might try the drug and never use it again.

Shah said it isn't unusual for men to want to try a new product when it comes on the market. That's what happened when Viagra arrived five years ago. Back then Viagra's promotion featured former presidential candidate Bob Dole explaining erectile dysfunction as a serious medical condition.

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The Pre-Law Society hopes to see you on Tuesday!

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The week of September 21 - September 25

Acct 209 Kratchman	Part 1 of 2 Mon Sept 22 7pm-10pm	Part 2 of 2 Tue Sept 23 7pm-10pm		
Acct 209 Strawser	Test Review Wed Sept 24 7pm-10pm			
Acct 210	Test Review Tue Sept 23 1pm-4pm			Get schedule updates by visiting <a href="http://www.4.0andGo.com">www.4.0andGo.com</a> and registering for our e-mail list.
Acct 229 Barrett/ Cassidy	Part 1 of 3 Wed Sept 24 10pm-1am	Part 2 of 3 Thu Sept 25 7pm-10pm		
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Biol 113 *****	Test Review Wed Sept 24 7:30pm-9:30pm			
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Econ 202 Allen	Part 1 of 2 Wed Sept 24 4pm-7pm	Part 2 of 2 Thu Sept 25 4pm-7pm		
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## NEWS IN BRIEF

### European leaders agree on Iraq role

BERLIN (AP) — Germany, France and Britain sought to project a new European consensus Saturday before next week's U.N. General Assembly meeting on Iraq's future, agreeing broadly on a significant role for the United Nations and a transfer of power to Iraqis. But they were still divided on how quickly that should happen.

There was no sign of movement from French President Jacques Chirac, who insisted again that power should be transferred to the Iraqis within months, despite U.S. insistence, shared by British Prime Minister Tony Blair, that it's too early to establish a timetable.

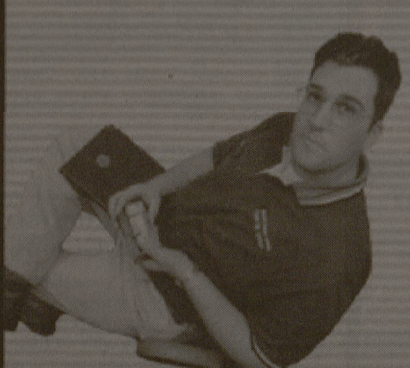
German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder sought to act as intermediary at the hastily called summit, the first to bring together the leaders of anti-war France and Germany with Blair, the United States' closest ally, since Europe split over the Iraq war.

### Man arrested for rapes in Miami

MIAMI (AP) — A man was arrested in a string of rapes in this city's Little Havana neighborhood, police chief John Timoney said Saturday.

Reynaldo Elias Rapalo, 32, a Honduran citizen whose visa had expired, was arrested Friday night and his DNA sample matched forensic evidence taken from the rape scenes, Timoney said. His fingerprints also matched and an eyewitness identified him as the rapist, he said.

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