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This Week's Issue

Republicans await Dems' options for funding SGR fix

By Rich Daly

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Republicans expect to receive on Thursday a list of Democratic options to pay for a large tax-cut extension measure that includes a freeze in scheduled cuts to Medicare physician pay rates. However, at least one Republican expects negotiations on the legislation to make little progress before a law freezing current policy in place expires at the end of the month.



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Democrats this week publicly rejected the House-passed measures Republicans offered to fund an extension of current Medicare physician pay rates for two years. Instead, Democrats said during a recent public hearing on the legislative package that a combination of a surtax on people with annual incomes over \$1 million and one-time savings—as defined by congressional budget rules—from the end of the Iraq War could fund permanent elimination of the physician pay system, known as the sustainable growth-rate formula.

However, Republicans said Wednesday that the negotiations on the law have stalled while they await a formal list of Democrat funding proposals in writing.

"The next step is for Senate Democrats to tell us where they are," Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.) said after a closed-door meeting of Republican negotiators on the legislation.

Rep. Tom Reed (R-N.Y.), another negotiator, highlighted the "symbolic" decision of the Democrats not to submit their proposals to pay for the legislative package in writing until now.

"There's been a calculation that's been made on their side that from a political point of view, they come out looking better pushing this all the way to the deadline and then having to deal with it then," Reed said.

Sen. Max Baucus (D-Mont.), the conference committee's senior Democrat, said Tuesday that he planned to submit a package of funding measures for the bill today. His office did not respond to questions about the timing of expected funding sources for the bill.

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