

#### House To Take Up Senate-Passed SCHIP Bill Next Week

House Speaker Pelosi told her Caucus today to expect to vote next Tuesday on a Senate-passed, \$35 billion children's healthcare bill. If the House passes an unchanged measure, the State Children's Health Insurance Program bill would go directly to the president days ahead of its Sept. 30 expiration date. Democratic leaders and the authors of the House and Senate bills will huddle this evening to discuss whether the Senate can accommodate any changes to its bill reauthorizing SCHIP. Ways and Means Chairman Rangel said today the SCHIP deal excludes any Medicare provisions that were in the broader House bill. He said Pelosi and Energy and Commerce Chairman Dingell will ask Senate negotiators to accept small changes to the Senate SCHIP package on issues such as mental health, dental care, immigrant coverage and pregnant women. "If all the demands are agreed to, it still would not include Medicare reform at this time. It's so sad," Rangel said. Senate negotiators have expressed a willingness to address Medicare in the future, and they want to find a way to stave off a scheduled 10 percent reduction in physician payments under Medicare, which goes into effect Jan. 1.

Sen. Orrin Hatch, R-Utah, who helped write the Senate bill, said he is willing to listen to Pelosi and Dingell's requests to add to SCHIP coverage. "It depends on what the final thing is," he said. "We don't want to lose any votes." President Bush has threatened to veto both the House and Senate bills. The Senate bill garnered a veto-proof 68 votes in July. The Senate's position also is strengthened by timing. House and Senate Democrats want an SCHIP bill on the president's desk before Sept. 30. If the House changes the Senate bill, the Senate would have to sign off on those changes, giving GOP leaders a chance to protest and cause delay. A Senate leadership aide said Republican leaders have not determined whether to block an SCHIP deal if given the opportunity. In the House, Democrats are likely to support the Senate bill, even though they wanted a broader bill. "This is still a step forward," said Rep. Allyson Schwartz, D-Pa., who ran Pennsylvania's SCHIP program before coming to Congress. "We would have been bolder," she added.

-- by Fawn Johnson, with Christian Bourge contributing

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