

CQ Transcript
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PROMO

SCHIP: House fails in second override attempt of SCHIP veto

MEDICAID: Governors push for more Medicaid funding as part of stimulus package.

ENTITLEMENT SPENDING: Senators seek entitlements task force.

INTRO: As the second session of the 110th Congress began, House Democrats failed in a second attempt to override President Bush's veto of legislation to expand the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). Separately, the nation's governors are pushing for additional Medicaid funding as part of an economic stimulus package, and Senate Budget Committee leaders said they would push for a vote this year on a proposed task force to address entitlement spending.

SCHIP

Question 1: House Democrats tried for a second time to override President Bush's veto last year of legislation that would have expanded the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). What happened?

Answer: The override vote, which totaled 260-152, was 15 votes short of the two-thirds majority required to override the president's veto. In October, the first veto override attempt failed by 13 votes.

Question 2: What impact does the veto override issue have on the SCHIP program?

Answer: Answer 2: Late last year, Bush signed into law legislation that would extend current funding for the SCHIP program through the end of March 2009, and that funding will maintain current levels of enrollment. But proponents of expanding SCHIP funding say the lack of additional funds makes it harder for states to provide health care coverage to children who need it.

Question 3: What's next on this issue?

Answer: With the presidential and congressional elections approaching this fall, Democrats are likely to keep the SCHIP expansion issue alive and will likely force Republicans to vote on the issue again. Expect children's health care coverage to be the focus of hearings and likely more floor votes this year.

MEDICAID

Question 4: Lawmakers in both chambers, as well as Bush Administration officials, have been discussing an economic stimulus package to boost the economy. Some involved in the discussion want Medicaid funding increased as part of this legislation. What's happening there?

Answer: Administration and Capitol Hill lawmakers are assembling an economic stimulus package to help the struggling economy. The nation's governors would very much like to have a temporary increase in federal Medicaid payments included in that package, but there's no additional Medicaid funding in a stimulus deal cut between House leaders and the White House. The governors said in a statement last week that they strongly support a combination of a \$6 billion block grant and \$6 billion in increased Medicaid funding to be included in any stimulus package enacted into law. And, additionally, the senate is now compiling it's own stimulus package which could be different from the house version.

Question 5: What's ahead on this issue?

Answer: When Senate Finance Committee members met late last week to discuss the Senate's version of economic stimulus legislation, they discussed the possibility of temporarily boosting federal Medicaid spending to help jump-start the economy, but it's unclear if that language will be added to the Senate's version of the economic stimulus bill. Labor, provider and patient advocacy groups have joined the governors in urging the Senate to add more Medicaid funding in the bill, but some House lawmakers and Bush administration officials have said that any delay in economic stimulus legislation could add more damage to an already ailing economy.

Question 6: What happens if Medicaid funding is not included in the current economic stimulus bill?

Answer: If Congress considers a second economic stimulus package later this year, Medicaid funding would likely be in the mix. But prospects for bipartisan action will no doubt worsen as the calendar gets closer to the presidential elections.

Entitlement Spending

Question 7: Some Senate lawmakers want to create a task force to address entitlement spending. Could you tell us about that?

Answer: Budget Committee Chairman Kent Conrad, D-ND., and Judd Gregg, R-N.H., the committee's ranking Republican, have said they will push for a vote this year on a proposal to create a task force to address long-term budget problems tied largely to entitlement spending. This has been a focus for the senators. In September, they introduced legislation that would create an entitlement commission made up of lawmakers and administration officials.

Question 8: How would the task force work?

Answer: It would be made up of 14 members of Congress, with eight Democrats and six Republicans and two administration officials, including the Treasury secretary. Twelve of the task force's 16 members would have to support recommendations made by the group. The group would draft proposals, which Congress would have to vote on, for how to handle expected budget pressure from Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid spending.

Question 9: What's ahead on this issue?

Answer: I doubt that during an election year that lawmakers will want to tackle the tough decisions that have to be made to reduce entitlement spending. Do you want to cut benefits? Increase taxes? Add to the existing deficit? Assemble some combination of the three? But the senators interest in the issue will no doubt increase the focus on entitlement spending, which will only increase with more Baby Boomers moving into retirement.