## House Leaders Work Toward Bipartisan Medicare Deal

**BY ALAN FRAM** 

Associated Press

WASHINGTON — In a rare show of unity, top House Republicans and Democrats are working toward an agreement permanently revamping how doctors are paid for treating Medicare patients, a package that lobbyists said would cost \$200 billion or more and be largely financed

by adding to the federal deficit. Because of that red ink, some conservatives have already come out against the plan, though others back it. That means House Speaker John Boehner, R-Ohio, could need votes from House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., for the agreement, just weeks after he needed Democratic support for legislation preventing the Homeland Security Department from shutting down.

Lawmakers and aides have said little about their efforts. But in an

unusual joint statement, both parties' leaders on two House committees - Ways and Means, and Energy and Commerce — said they were holding "active discussions on a bipartisan basis" toward fixing the doctors' fee formula, strengthening Medicare and financing a popular

children's health program.
The potential Medicare deal could change as House leaders gauge support and make adjustments to win votes, said the lobbyists, who spoke on condition of anonymity to reveal details of congressional negotiations.

But its basic elements seem generally set, including an end to an 18year-old formula that has long bedeviled Congress, repeatedly prompting lawmakers to block unrealistically deep cuts in doctors' Medicare reimbursements. Doctors say the constant threat of such reductions makes some reluctant to

serve recipients of Medicare, the federal health program for the

elderly Without congressional action, the next cut — 21 percent — would begin April 1. Racing that deadline, House aides have been crafting the plan behind closed doors, with Senate staff from both parties being kept informed.

Congressional passage before that deadline remains uncertain, and a temporary measure may be needed to block the cuts and give lawmakers more time to write a final package. Congress has passed 17 bills temporarily averting the reductions

The new package — with a 10-year price tag of \$200 billion or more is also expected to include money for the Children's Health Insurance Program, whose budget will soon run dry. Some lobbyists say the agreement would include around \$5 billion for the program, which is popular

with both parties but especially so among Democrats, enough to keep it running another two years.

Under the emerging agreement, lawmakers would not pay for the roughly \$140 billion expense of eliminating fee cuts that would otherwise occur over the next 10 years, said the lobbyists.

Around \$60 billion or more in the package would pay for a new system of annually updating how doctors are paid under Medicare; some other expiring Medicare and Medicaid programs; and the children's health

Those expenses would be financed with savings divided roughly evenly between Medicare beneficiaries and providers, though that could change, the lobbyists said.

For beneficiaries, those savings are expected to include larger premiums for the highest-earning Medicare recipients and increased out-ofpocket costs for people with Medigap policies, which cover costs not insured by Medicare.

Reimbursement cuts are possible for some nursing homes, home health providers and perhaps hospitals fac-

ing debt from patients' unpaid bills. Both parties have long favored eliminating the 1997 Medicare formula for reimbursing doctors but

clashed over how to finance that. Conservative groups including Heritage Action for America and the Club for Growth criticized the budding proposal for its red ink, suggesting that some of the House's most conservative Republicans might continue their pattern of rebelling against their leaders.

"Americans didn't hand Republicans a historic House majority to engage in more deficit spending and budget gimmickry," said Heritage spokesman Dan Holler. He said a measure that isn't fully paid for would be "a nonstarter for conservatives.

## Lake

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steakhouse, boating and swimming and it was a very busy place.'

Hunhoff said issues began to be reported following a 2012 revitalization project.

The Game, Fish & Parks Department (GF&P) appreciated that it's a neat little spot and everybody was encouraged when they decided to build a new dam and spillway and a road over it," he said. "The hope was (the lake) was going to be a little bit deeper. ... Everybody was excited about that, and then the project was actually completed, it turns out the property owners along the lake believe it's actually a foot or two shallower."

Cheri Loest, who owns property just west of the lake, said this had a number of effects on the lake's ecosystem.

"The lake did not fill to the same level it was previously, Loest said. "Homeowners

around the lake ... noticed it was at least 12-inches too short when it spilled over because they had markers out on their property and they could certainly tell the water was not as high as it once was. This has allowed a lot

She added this has had adverse effects on the properties themselves.

of grass and reeds to grow

where they didn't used to

grow.'

"That is causing quite an issue, certainly with values of the property and aesthetics and usability because the lake is shallower than it once was," she said.

Loest said this prompted meetings with GF&P.

'There have been meetings between the homeowners out there and GF&P so

the homeowners could express their concerns," she said. "The GF&P did an investigation into it. There was a second meeting (last) October where the GF&P felt that the overflow was the exact same height as it was on the old bridge. There is discrepancy in opinion between if there is a problem or not. The homeowners are adamant that there is a change in the negative sense and the GF&P believes there is not a change."

Attempts by the *Press* & Dakotan to contact GF&P were unsuccessful.

Loest said residents around the lake then filed notice with the state — a move she said sparked rumors of legal action.

'The residents who live along the lake have filed a notice with the state that they believe there is a concern with the bridge that has negatively affected their property," she said. "By law, they have to file that notice so that the state knew about it officially. They couldn't just do an oral com-

plaint. They had to officially notify the state. I know there's been a rumor that all of these folks have every intent to sue the state to fix the bridge. That is not the intent of the homeowners. They simply want the problem fixed."

She said there has been talk of potential fixes to the spillway, but the GF&P has been out of contact with the

homeowners since October. Hunhoff said having grown up around the lake, he's acting as a connection between the property owners and the state.

"I grew up out in that neighborhood and I know all of those folks," he said. "They're good folks who feel that their property values have been damaged and a state resource has been damaged and we need to get that fixed.

In addition to discussing

the issues at Beaver Lake, the commission will also field bids for warning sirens and discuss bridge inspection results. The commission will meet Monday at 3:30 p.m. in the commission chambers at the Yankton County Government Center.

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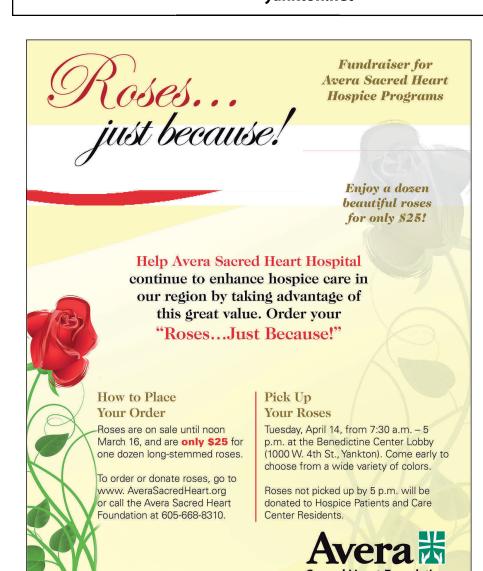
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