

House devotes \$90 million to Medicare payoffs

By James Kuhnenn
Knight Ridder Newspapers

WASHINGTON (KRT) — House Republican leaders tucked a payoff into last week's emergency anti-terrorism spending bill: \$90 million in special Medicare reimbursements for hospitals in three congressional districts — two in Pennsylvania, the other in New York.

House Speaker Dennis Hastert, it turns out, ordered the payoff in exchange for the lawmakers' votes to give President Bush greater trade negotiating powers.

For all the talk that the Bush administration would bring frugality to Washington, the truth is that spending — both large and in pork-barrel doses — is still the craze.

And it shows: Government spending is back in the red. Congress has yet to pass a federal budget to discipline its outlays, and the nation's legal debt limit — the maximum the government can borrow — is about to burst.

The government's mounting deficits threaten such bipartisan goals as low-cost prescription drugs for the elderly and shoring up Social Security for the retiring baby boom generation. Bush's commitment to end deficit spending in two years is proving elusive, alarming Wall Street investors.

They're unlikely to be reassured when the Senate returns from its Memorial Day recess on Tuesday to take up its version of the emer-

gency spending bill.

The Senate's \$31 billion assortment of defense and homeland security outlays is \$2 billion more than the House passed in May and nearly \$4 billion more than the president requested.

The legislation has become a test of fiscal discipline that both Congress and the Bush administration. Lawmakers are already tempting themselves by including an array of non-emergency pork-barrel goodies aimed at helping out select constituencies back home. And Bush, eager to get on with the war on terrorism, may be willing to pay the extra price.

At the White House, "They do a lot of talking about the need for re-

duced spending, but they've actually done very little to reduce spending," said Joe Theissen, a former U.S. Chamber of Commerce lobbyist and now head of Taxpayers for Common Sense, a nonpartisan fiscal watchdog group. "In an election year, with clearly some of this money needed, the White House has been reticent to say it will veto the thing."

Economists are worried, too, about this year's likely budget deficit. Once, 2002 was expected to chalk up a small surplus. Now it's expected to end as much as \$140 billion into the red, pushed down by an unexpected slump in federal tax revenues.

Just last year, the Congressional Budget Office predicted a whopping 10-year surplus of \$5.6 trillion. The latest forecast, issued in March, chopped that projection down to \$681 billion and predicted at least three straight years of deficits. The reasons are Bush's \$1.35 trillion tax cut last year, the economic downturn and increased spending in the aftermath of Sept. 11.

The red ink promises political finger pointing, though neither side is exactly pure. Twelve Senate Democrats voted for the tax cuts last year. And when it comes to spending, Bush two weeks ago disappointed fiscal conservatives in his party by signing a Democrat-inspired farm bill that will cost \$190 billion over 10 years.

The fiscal picture is gloomy enough that the administration wants Congress' permission to borrow more money by raising the debt ceiling. No one doubts that Congress ultimately will acquiesce, but Democrats want to use the opportunity to mount a full-throated assault on Bush's tax cut.

Still ahead is the annual rite of passing appropriation bills — the 13 pieces of legislation that finance all the major functions of government except for Social Security and Medicare.

But first, lawmakers would like to adopt a budget that sets spending limits for those appropriations. Right now the Republican-controlled House has settled on \$759 billion, including \$10 billion in anti-terrorism money that Bush could use at his discretion. Democrats, who control the Senate by one vote, want nearly \$10 billion more.

Senate majority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D., would like to use the emergency anti-terrorism spending bill as leverage to secure that higher number. "If we can agree on numbers, and lock in place a ceiling, that would be real progress," he said before leaving for the Memorial Day recess.

House fiscal conservatives, already wary of big spending on items such as the farm bill, are bound to balk, setting up a confrontation in the House.

Turn to Medicare, page 7

Today's crossword solution

P	A	M	P	A	S	A	U	N	T	R	A	W
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Master Plan

continued from page 1

brainstorming and discussion stage in the process.

"We plan on being finished with the draft report in December," said Sarah Miller, a project team member and the architect in charge of pre-design and programming for the project.

Miller specializes in pre-design work at institutions of higher education and has a combined background in architecture and interior design.

"Essentially, we are providing a preliminary guide for growth, which will be presented to the University core team in January," she said.

Through the next three stages of the process — "Programming Definition," "Concept Definition" and "Development of Documentation" — the project team will work to prepare the presentation and the final report to obtain approval for the project.

"We're not at the sexy part," EMU Director Dusty Miller said. "We're simply defining the vision and goals of the project at this point."

The "sexy part," as he defined it, will come when the project team has fully conceptualized the plan. At that time, they will begin to ask organizations, businesses and offices in the EMU what they need in terms of space and convenience of location, he said. But that stage won't follow until mid to late October, Sarah Miller said.

The Core Team's draft of the Master Plan mission statement is organized by 13 topics and concerns. Among the list of topics, community, "way-finding" and technology have evoked the most discussion in town meetings and student groups.

"This project has a uniqueness to it that we all sensed in the selection process," project team design architect Stephen Bennion said. "There is a very intense user involvement here ... a lot of care, which is very interesting because it poses a challenge and demands a greater effort."

During the discussion on community, Core Team members and community members in attendance talked about the "homey" addition of fireplaces, much like the natural and colorful flare added by the fish pond located in the EMU Food Court.

In the discussion on way-finding, a topic encompassing issues related to accessibility and the layout of the building, one recommendation that has been made is to create an information desk to add a "human touch". Community members suggested more parking to increase accessibility and recommended better signs to prevent a "maze" feeling in the building.

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Dusty Miller
EMU director

While discussing technology and how the University has changed during the past five decades, core team members suggested placing solar panels in the EMU Amphitheater and improving Internet availability and accessibility throughout the facility, possibly through "cyber stations or cafes."

"This process is about what this university is about," said Jeffrey Stebar, the third architect of the project team trio. "It's the University of Oregon solution."

Despite their common goal of improving the EMU over the next two decades, Dusty Miller and Sarah Miller don't quite agree on what the most enticing part of the Master Plan process is.

"I think the sexy part is the planning," Sarah Miller said.

Town meetings will be held next fall for all students, faculty and staff who have suggestions for the project. For a list of all the mission statement areas, visit the EMU Web site at emu.uoregon.edu and click on EMU Master Plan.

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