

# Bush supports Medicare bill

Although the president praises the bill, the House and Senate still disagree on several of its policies

By Jill Zuckman  
Chicago Tribune (KRT)

WASHINGTON — Scrambling to rescue one of his top domestic priorities, President Bush urged Congress on Wednesday to break a logjam and complete a deal on a Medicare reform bill that would provide a prescription drug benefits to 40 million senior citizens.

"The Congress needs to finalize legislation that brings our seniors the best of modern medicine," said Bush, surrounded by senior citizens and health care advocates at the White House. "And I want to sign that legislation into law before the year is out."

Lawmakers have been stuck for months trying to reconcile differences between bills passed by the House and Senate, but Bush's words seemed to do little to move negotiations along. The two chambers disagree, among other things, on whether the Medicare program should be forced to compete with private health plans.

Democrats said that despite his public exhortations, Bush was doing little of the arm-twisting and cajoling that would be necessary to bring about a compromise.

"If that's the only message, then I think the president is failing to use his influence to move this legislative process along successfully," said Senate Minority Leader Tom Daschle, D-S.D.

Daschle added that Bush "can

bring these matters to successful resolution if he weighs in. But he's got to weigh in with a recognition that we have two parties, and they are very evenly divided here in the Congress, and we need to recognize on both sides that there has to be accommodation."

Throughout negotiations between the Senate and House, Bush has had little personal involvement in resolving key differences. Now, as Congress gets closer to adjournment, lawmakers acknowledged that they still have major disagreements, and they may have exceeded their \$400 billion price cap.

The political stakes are great for both sides — though perhaps more so for Bush and the Republicans, since they control the White House and Congress. Bush has promised to do all he can to enact a prescription drug benefit, and elderly voters may react angrily if he fails.

But Republicans still require Democratic assistance to pass the Medicare legislation, and the finger-pointing has already begun in case lawmakers cannot reach a deal.

House Majority Leader Tom DeLay, R-Texas, said Wednesday that Democrats have no interest in passing the legislation because they prefer to use it as a political issue.

"They have said they don't want to get this done. They are going to try their best to obstruct," DeLay said. "They don't want a bill passed by a Republican Congress and signed by a Republican president."

But other lawmakers, including some Republicans, said House conservatives had hijacked the process

and the conference committee, the panel of House and Senate lawmakers charged with working out a deal.

Lawmakers have been discussing a plan to require seniors to pay premiums of about \$35 a month for prescription drugs, as well as a deductible of \$275. The program would pay about 75 percent of seniors' drug costs up to \$2,200.

After that, seniors would pay the total cost of their medicine — a gap in coverage known as a "donut hole" — until they reach a point where a "catastrophic" benefit kicks in, covering 95 percent of the bills.

Members of Congress are still at odds, however, over whether to force wealthier seniors to pay higher premiums, whether to require the traditional fee-for-service Medicare program to compete with private health plans, whether to institute spending limits if future cost increases exceed predictions, and whether to allow seniors to buy drugs from Canada and other countries.

Many lawmakers are also deeply worried that a prescription drug plan for seniors could cause corporations to jettison drug benefits they are already providing to retirees.

During his talk at the White House Wednesday, Bush said an executive from Caterpillar Corp. had assured him that no such thing would happen. "If there's a Medicare reform bill signed by me, corporations have no intention to ... dump retirees into a system they don't want to be dumped into," Bush said.

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## Campus News

# Reading Series features novelist

The Creative Writing Reading Series will host novelist Ehud Havazelet at 8 p.m. today

By Andrew Shipley  
Freelance Reporter

The University Creative Writing Program will continue its annual Creative Writing Reading Series tonight with a visit from novelist Ehud Havazelet, one of the program's own professors.

Havazelet will read from his most recent novel, "Like Never Before," at 8 p.m. in the Knight Library Browsing Room. The book examines family relationships through the stories of a Jewish family living in New York. The reading will be followed by a question and answer period and book signings.

Havazelet has published two novels and is the recipient of numerous honors, including a Whiting Award and a Guggenheim grant.

In addition to tonight's reading, Havazelet will hold a workshop with Creative Writing Program master's of fine arts students at 2 p.m. on Friday in the EMU Ben Linder Room. The workshop will be open to all University students, but participation is limited to students in the program.

Havazelet's reading is the second in the 2003-04 series. The program brings one poet and one novelist to the University every term to present and discuss his or her work with students and faculty.

This year's series coordinator, Professor David Bradley of the Creative

Writing Program, has attempted to expand the series' impact on campus by opening Friday's master's program workshop to the entire University.

"We have these visitors conduct a class, but in the past it has been closed," Bradley said. "This year we are opening it up to everyone. If you're interested, come by the (creative writing) office and we have copies of the work that anyone can pick up."

**"Words can be dead on a page, but if a reading is good, it can be like the difference between hearing music played and looking at the notes on the page."**

David Bradley  
Creative writing professor

Bradley hopes this option will provide students with the opportunity to experience what a master's-level writing program is like.

"You can't get a major here in creative writing," he said. "The master's program is completely closed off. With the open workshop on Friday, people who might be interested in writing or maybe just curious can come and check it out. We get some very distinguished authors."

This year the tradition of excellence

continues, with readings by the nationally acclaimed poet B.H. Fairchild and the prolific novel and short-story author Frederick Busch.

Turn out for the series' first reading was strong, but Bradley said he would like to see increased participation from general University students.

"Readings are fun. Literature can be entertaining," Bradley said. "Words can be dead on a page, but if a reading is good, it can be like the difference between hearing music played and looking at the notes on the page."

For Havazelet, who describes one of his novel's themes as the "interplay of the personal and the political in a life history," he said the instability in the world today makes literature carry even more of an impact.

"Especially in these times, when so many are ready to go to war to prove their single version of the truth, literature is more important than ever," he said.

Thus far, students have seemed to respond positively to the series.

"As a writing student, or any student, it's an amazing opportunity to be able to hear writers read from and talk about their work," graduate student Michael Davis said.

This sentiment was echoed by a number of students in attendance at the first reading by poet Pimone Triplett, where many members of the audience had to stand because of attendance.

Andrew Shipley is a freelance reporter for the Emerald.

### Friday

Religious Studies symposium, 3 p.m.-4:30 p.m., 110 Knight Law Center. William Schniedewind of UCLA will explore "How the Bible Became a Book." A book sale and reception will follow the event.

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