

House GOP Maps New Strategy on Medicare

By Emily Pierce
ROLL CALL STAFF

No longer content to let Democrats roundly criticize the new Medicare prescription drug law and Bush administration efforts to publicize it, the House Republican Conference hopes to enlist its Members in launching a media counteroffensive touting the new law via public service announcements.

GOP Conference staffers have begun to develop a script they hope their Members will use to tape television and radio public service

announcements that would air in their districts, according to Conference spokesman Greg Crist.

Television and radio stations generally air PSAs, such as those discouraging drug use, at no cost because they are largely apolitical.

Crist said the Conference-designed PSAs would ideally have a Member of Congress speaking directly to his or her district's seniors on local TV and radio.

The script would have the Member introduce him or herself, tell seniors that there

are new benefits under Medicare and instruct them to call 1-800-MEDICARE or the Member's office for more information.

"It's another tool to let seniors know there are options available to them," said Crist, who said seniors may also be directed to a Web site, www.medicare.gov, run by the Department of Health and Human Services.

The decision by the House Republican Conference to get involved comes as many Democrats and interest groups have cried foul over a \$22 million plan by HHS to run simi-

lar ads and send flyers to Medicare-eligible seniors.

Saying the HHS Medicare prescription drug ads are vague and misleading, Democrats convinced the General Accounting Office on Friday to investigate whether the ad campaign violates a federal law barring the use of public funds for "political or propaganda purposes."

In response to the investigation and Democratic charges of taxpayer-funded political

See **MEDICARE**, page 14

Democrats Anticipate Momentum

By Erin P. Billings
ROLL CALL STAFF

Fresh off their annual retreat to plot election-year strategy, House Democrats for the first time in recent months believe they have a legitimate shot at narrowing the margin of their minority, sources throughout the Caucus indicate.

Senior-level Democratic aides said Monday the Caucus members are not walking away from the three-day session convinced they can regain a House majority in 2004, but feel momentum is turning in their favor. House Democrats, aides said, left the conference planning to focus their election-year message on Republicans' lack of credibility on core issues of the economy and the war in Iraq, as well as the GOP pushing the "wrong priorities."

"We're in the game now," said one leadership aide. "That's a big difference from a couple of months ago. Everything is in place for us to do very well. The ground is starting to shift around these Republicans, and we know it."

With 205 members of their Caucus, Democrats need to pick up 13 seats to win back the majority. Given the current playing field, the minority party would have to win at least three quarters of the competitive House races to take back the chamber this cycle.

"We know how difficult it is to take back the House," said one Democratic leadership aide, who added: "We have to believe we can do it. If we don't believe, no one else will. We can do it."

Even though achieving a Democratic House is highly unlikely, aides suggested attitudes have been bolstered by recent polling — some of which was presented at the retreat, held at Virginia's Homestead Resort — showing they have the nation's ear on key issues, can field a competitive presidential candidate and have a solid a chance at winning several key House races never before targeted.

"Members felt that this is in fact doable," Andrew Kauders, spokesman for Democratic Caucus Chairman Bob Menendez (N.J.), said of making gains this cycle. "They feel that with the right message and strategy, this is doable."

House Democrats are banking on winning upcoming special elections in Kentucky and South Dakota. Wins in those states wouldn't reverse the landscape, they acknowledge, but would help soften the nasty blow in the Texas redistricting case that led Rep. Ralph Hall to join the GOP and endangered as many as six Democratic incumbents.

See **RETREAT**, page 14

BUCKLE UP



Chris Maddaloni/Roll Call

Sens. John Warner (left) and Mike DeWine, along with Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton, called Monday for passage of the National Highway Safety Act of 2003, which urges states to pass primary enforcement seat belt laws or increase belt usage. States that fail to do so would lose 2 percent of their highway funding; the Transportation Department opposes the provision.

GPO May Seek New Headquarters

By Jennifer Yachnin
ROLL CALL STAFF

There are no "for sale" signs up yet, but the Government Printing Office is considering moving out of the North Capitol Street facility it has occupied since 1860.

GPO cited costs for maintaining its current 1.5 million-square-foot headquarters — esti-

mated at between \$275 million and \$530 million over the next five to 10 years — among the primary reasons for searching for a new facility.

Additionally, a fact sheet on the proposal notes that the four-building facility is no longer necessary for a staff of only 2,300 employees, down from a one-time high of 8,500

staff members.

"This building is not meeting our current needs, and it's not going to meet our future needs," said GPO spokeswoman Veronica Meter. Under Title 44 of the U.S. Code, GPO is responsible for the printing and information dissemination needs of Congress, as

See **GPO**, page 16

Office Buildings Reopen, but Mail on Hold

By Suzanne Nelson
ROLL CALL STAFF

The last of the three Senate office buildings reopened Monday morning, but incoming mail to both sides of the Capitol remains suspended indefinitely pending a full review.

With the exception of three fourth-floor rooms in the Dirksen Senate Office Building adjacent to the room in Majority Leader Bill Frist's (R-Tenn.) personal office where ricin was found last week, staffers were allowed back in the building Monday.

Delivery of U.S. Postal Service mail continues to be suspended pending a thorough review of security procedures. However, pick-

up and delivery of internal mail (including newspaper delivery and "Dear Colleague" letters) as well as pickup of outgoing mail has resumed for both the House and Senate. Courier deliveries have also resumed.

Capitol tours, both staff-led and through the Guide Service, resumed Thursday.

Senate restaurants in Dirksen reopened Monday. The Senate Chef (in the Hart Building) and Cups & Company (in the Russell Building) have been operational since their host buildings reopened. The Senate Barber Shop in Russell has also reopened.

Senate parking in underground garages has resumed, although portions of Lot 16 are oc-

cupied by "agency-support" vehicles, reducing space in that surface lot. The number of vehicles will diminish over the course of the week, according to a spokeswoman for the Senate Sergeant-at-Arms office. Overflow permit parking from Lot 16 will be allowed in Lot 19 on a first-come, first-served basis before 10 a.m.

The Capitol subway is operating on a normal schedule to all buildings. The Capitol itself and the House office buildings did not close last week, although similar mail procedures were taken on both sides of the Capitol, including pickups of all unopened correspondence.

DSCC Compares Judiciary Probe to Watergate

PICKLE, from page 1
member on Judiciary.

Leahy sat in on the Senators-only briefing with Sens. Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.), Dianne Feinstein (D-Calif.) and Dick Durbin (D-Ill.), all of whom declined to speak of the details of where Pickle stands in his three-month investigation into how GOP staffers took what now appears to be thousands of Democratic files off of their computers.

While their levels of belief in the probability of a criminal investigation varied slightly, each of the Senators raised the issue of an increasing likelihood that the probe would bring about criminal charges.

"I think there's a possibility of a criminal investigation," Feinstein said.

Kennedy added that the accessing of memos was "probably criminal."

Bruce Artim, chief counsel on the committee for Chairman Orrin Hatch (R-Utah), was allowed to attend the briefing, although all Democratic staff were kicked out early on. After Artim was allowed to attend, Leahy's chief counsel, Bruce Cohen, also attended the briefing.

The swelling controversy has already resulted in the resignation last week of Majority Leader Bill Frist's (R-Tenn.) top adviser on judicial nominations, Manuel Miranda, who has admitted to reading Democratic memos when he worked on the Judiciary Committee in 2001 and 2002.

Another committee staffer, a legislative assistant, has already admitted playing a lead role in accessing the Democratic memos and left the committee about a month ago.

Miranda's resignation letter, a version of which was given to Roll Call and media outlets over the weekend and an updated version of which was circulated Monday, fanned the flames of the investigation even further in Democratic circles. He claimed that "perhaps thousands" of Democratic documents were downloaded off a jointly shared server by the majority and minority staffs.

In Monday's version of the resignation letter, Miranda also said many GOP staff members on the committee were aware of what was happening, but he stopped short of accusing other staffers of accessing and reading the memos.

"Although I never discussed this with any other colleagues, I knew that other Hatch counsels and staff came to know about the glitch and that some had concluded that the access was not unlawful," he wrote.

Miranda claimed that of the thousands of documents downloaded, he downloaded files himself only a "few times." The vast majority of the files were downloaded by the other staffer, and of those, Miranda read only a small percentage.



File Photo

Sen. Dick Durbin (above) said he was stunned by Sergeant-at-Arms Bill Pickle's talk, noting that the "extent and duration of this theft far exceeded" his expectation.

Durbin said he was stunned by Pickle's presentation, noting that the "extent and duration of this theft far exceeded" what he thought was involved.

Miranda and a battalion of conservative legal activists have maintained that neither he nor the other former GOP staffer did anything illegal or unethical. They have used phrases such as "technological glitch" to describe what they consider to be a Democratic mis-

take in having a technology system that allowed GOP staff to read the memos.

As Miranda put it in his resignation letter, "I concluded that these unprotected documents were virtually placed on our desks. From a technology point of view, they were at most left in a common area."

But Democratic activists cite federal laws saying anyone who "intentionally accesses a computer without authorization or exceeds

authorized access" faces up to 10 years in prison. The critical issue in a criminal battle would be the definition of what level of access Miranda and other Republicans had.

Kennedy suggested that when Pickle files his official report, expected to be later this month, Leahy and Hatch would sit down with Frist and Minority Leader Tom Daschle (D-S.D.) to determine the next step.

Presumably, if there were enough evidence to warrant a criminal case, the Justice Department would receive the report and take over the probe, but the Democrats said no determination has been made for how to hand off the probe.

"That has to be resolved," Durbin said.

And the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee jumped on the scandal Monday, issuing an e-mail fundraising alert to supporters that likened the issue to a "high-tech Watergate break-in" and compared it to the 2000 elections in Florida.

"Send a signal that these Watergate-style tactics are wrong," wrote David Rudd, executive director of the DSCC.

Miranda and other conservatives contend that the Judiciary Democrats are the ones in ethical jeopardy, that the memos that have so far been publicized show a collusion of activity that breaks the chamber's ethics rules.

Miranda filed a complaint with the Ethics Committee on Friday, alleging that other unpublicized memos show that outside interest groups were promising financial support to certain Senate Democrats in the 2002 elections if unnamed judicial nominations were blocked.

Democrats, in addition to their pushing for a criminal investigation of Miranda and any other Hatch staffer involved in the memo probe, are also privately warning that ethics complaints could be filed with the legal bar associations for any Republican staffer who engaged in accessing the memos or knew of the memos.

GPO May Move From N. Capitol Street

GPO, from page 3

well as executive branch departments and agencies.

While GPO officials have not selected a new location — Meter said the agency will stay within the Washington, D.C., metropolitan area — the agency will put a formal request for information on the federal government's procurement Web site, FedBizOpps.gov, today.

Meter noted the project is in the "very, very

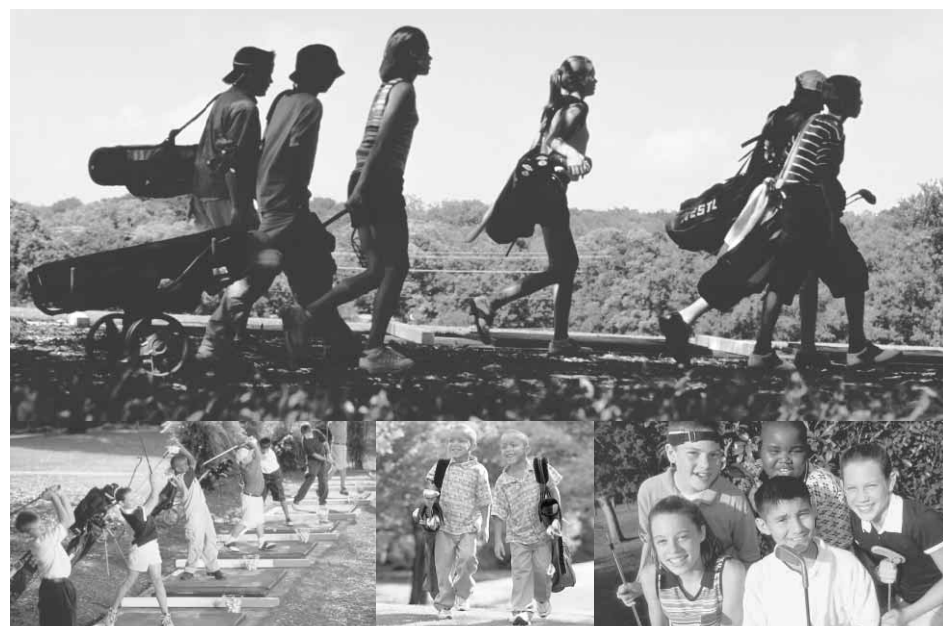
early stages." A fact sheet provided by GPO states a plan for the new facility would be approved by summer 2005, and the new headquarters would be ready for use by Dec. 31, 2007.

The search for a new facility is part of the reorganization plan initiated by Public Printer Bruce James shortly after he took over GPO's helm in December 2002. Within the past year, the agency has closed nearly all of its bookstores, keeping open the North Cap-

itol Street headquarters and a warehouse for dealers in Laurel, Md.

If GPO were to move, its current headquarters — four buildings constructed between 1903 and 1940 — could be renovated for commercial use.

"Using conventional metrics, the 1.5 million square feet available at the GPO sites could be redeveloped into office and retail space that could potentially employ thousands of new workers," a GPO fact sheet states.



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