

House Republicans Consider Changing Reconciliation Vote

House Republican leaders face more possible GOP defections Wednesday when they bring legislation to the floor that would trim the growth of entitlement programs and otherwise reduce the deficit by \$39 billion over five years. Reversing last month's 212-206 vote in favor of the bill would still appear to be a long shot, however.

Over the weekend **House Science Chairman Boehlert**, who supported the measure last month when it came to the House floor, told Gannett News Service, "I don't know how I'm going to vote."

Rep. **Mike Fitzpatrick**, R-Pa., also said over the weekend he was now undecided on whether to vote for the reconciliation bill. The freshman lawmaker voted for the bill last month. "This is a matter that's under consideration," Fitzpatrick told The Intelligencer of Upper/Central Bucks and Montgomery counties in Pennsylvania.

The reconciliation bill has passed both chambers by slim margins, but another vote is necessary in the House because of small changes made by the Senate before passage.

Rep. **John Sweeney**, R-N.Y., another reconciliation supporter last month, is also undecided, a spokeswoman said, because he wants to review the Senate-made changes.

Rep. **Christopher Shays**, R-Conn., also has indicated some hesitation. Only one Republican, Rep. **Rob Simmons** of Connecticut, has thus far publicly announced he will switch from supporting to opposing the measure.

A spokeswoman for **House Majority Whip Blunt**, who is running for House majority leader in party elections to be held the following day, said most Republicans were unlikely to defect on a bill of such importance to the GOP.

"The House is already on record on the deficit reduction bill twice. Most members aren't in a position of reversing themselves on tough votes," she said. "Mr. Blunt is confident that members recognize the very negative consequences of delayed enactment."

Boehlert agreed to back the bill originally after food stamp cuts were removed and low-income heating and dairy subsidies were included.

Boehlert told Gannett he was concerned the heating funds would not kick in until FY07, and that his staff was looking at "every nook and cranny" of the bill before he commits to it.

Boehlert said he was meeting with a wide-ranging group of constituents and interest groups before deciding.

Fitzpatrick, who represents a competitive district, has been under pressure from local activists to oppose the bill, arguing it would force unfair changes to the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families program and cause child support payments to go uncollected. The American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees has been running ads in Fitzpatrick's district protesting Medicaid cuts that would affect low-income seniors.