

## Senators Alexander And Murray Once Again Close To Reaching Stabilization Deal

Senate health committee Chair Lamar Alexander (R-TN) and ranking Democrat Patty Murray (WA) are close to a deal on a market stabilization package, although Republican leaders continue to signal caution on whether the House and Senate will pass the measure.

The renewed optimism about a bipartisan stabilization deal comes one day after the deadline passed for insurers to sign contracts with CMS to participate in the exchanges, and days after rates spiked again in many states amid Capitol Hill's chaotic push of the Graham-Cassidy bill that ultimately stalled this week.

Senate Minority Leader Charles Schumer (D-NY) took to the Senate floor to say he had spoken with both Alexander and Murray and they had told him they're on the verge of a deal, and added he has full faith in Murray to negotiate on behalf of the Democrats. He said he hopes Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) has given the same backing to Alexander.

Alexander cautioned that though he and Murray could come up with a deal, they still face the challenging of getting enough Democrats and Republicans on board, before passing it along to Schumer and McConnell.

"Then we've got the matter of eventually persuading the Senate, the House of Representatives and the president to sign it," Alexander said. "We're taking it a step at a time."

The more than 40-strong bipartisan Problem Solvers Caucus has been rallying for the Alexander-Murray effort. The National Governors Association also came out with a strong push for Congress to move immediately to stabilize the individual insurance market.

Meanwhile, the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation and the Urban Institute put out a joint analysis on potential revisions to the ACA that could help stabilize the markets.

Former Senate majority leader's Bill Frist and Tom Daschle of the Bipartisan Policy Center (BPC) backed the Alexander-Murray effort and outlined some of the ideas from the major BPC stabilization proposal that includes loosening the requirements around 1332 waivers, an idea that Alexander and Murray are discussing.

Frist said the Alexander and Murray effort is a crucial step to move congressional health policy talks into bipartisan territory because their package will be narrow and open the door to a more substantial bipartisan reform effort.