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GOP deadlocked for Stupak seat

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One vote: That's all that separates the two Republicans vying for the right to seek retiring Michigan Democratic Rep. Bart Stupak's House seat.

The unofficial vote tally kept by the Michigan secretary of state's office showed physician Dan Benishek with 27,091 votes Wednesday, compared with 27,090 for state Sen. Jason Allen. (The Associated Press gave Benishek a slightly larger, 12-vote lead.)

It's a margin so slim that the top two primary finishers could remain in limbo through weeks or even months of ballot-counting and litigation. And Democratic state Rep. Gary McDowell, who had a clear shot at his party's nomination, could end up with a significant head start on the general election.

"Apparently we have to hire these lawyers, the recount lawyers. It's just amazing," Benishek told POLITICO in an interview Wednesday. In Michigan, candidates can request recounts in specific precincts at a cost of \$10 each or have the whole district recounted.

Allen's campaign would not say definitively whether the candidate would seek a recount but spoke positively about the process as one designed to protect voters. "When there is a one-vote difference, I think we are looking at democracy in action, and absolutely we would look at further scrutiny and make a decision about a recount," said Denise DeCook, an Allen consultant.

If the results hold, the contest will end up as one of the closest House campaigns in memory — far closer, even, than the 2004 general election fight between now-Florida Rep. Vern Buchanan and banker Christine Jennings, who battled each other to a 369-vote difference in what the House historian calls the most recent disputed House election.

First, however, Michigan officials have to certify the election results, and the near-tie is expected to take at least two weeks — and probably much longer — to resolve.

That's because counties have until Aug. 17 to certify their election results, Michigan Department of State spokesman Ken Silfven told POLITICO. Then, a state board will meet Aug. 23 to certify the winner. After that, the losing candidate has two days to request a recount. The winner then has seven days to object. Only after the board considers any objections can a recount begin.

A contested recount could place significant strain on the Michigan Republican Party, and on both candidates, as the November election approaches.

Benishek, who started running against Stupak in January before the incumbent bowed out, and with

just his family and friends to support his campaign, has no intention of dropping out. "As far as I'm concerned, I won the election and that's all there is to it. I'm going to stand up for my rights as anyone else would in this situation," he said.

DeCook would not address whether Allen might be willing to concede. "We'll make that decision after we've gone through all of those steps over the next several weeks," she said.