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WITH DEADLINE FOR FEDERAL MEDICARE PART D PLAN RAPIDLY APPROACHING, GOV. BLAGOJEVICH, U.S. REPS EMANUEL, SCHAKOWSKY URGE IL SENIORS TO ENROLL IN ILLINOIS CARES Rx TO AVOID FACING GAPS IN COVERAGE

GOVERNOR, REP. EMANUEL REITERATE SUPPORT FOR SCHAKOWSKY PLAN TO POSTPONE MEDICARE PART D DEADLINE TO ALLOW MORE TIME FOR ILLINOIS SENIORS TO ENROLL

CHICAGO, IL - With the May 15th deadline to enroll in Medicare Part D without penalty rapidly approaching, Governor Rod R. Blagojevich today joined Congressman Rahm Emanuel (D-5) and Congresswoman Jan Schakowsky (D-9) at North Park Village Senior Center in Chicago to urge Illinois seniors, who have yet to enroll in the new Medicare Part D program, to enroll in the state's generous Illinois Cares Rx program to avoid facing gaps in their insurance coverage. Governor Blagojevich and Representative Emanuel also expressed support for Rep. Schakowsky's legislation to extend the May 15th deadline for the federal program (Illinois' program is designed to fill in the gaps in the coverage offered by the federal program).

"We don't believe that seniors should face gaps in their prescription drug coverage, and that's why we created Illinois Cares Rx. So far, over 240,000 senior citizens have signed up for our new program. But for those who have not, now is a good time to enroll, so you don't end up facing the gaps in the federal program's coverage. I also want to thank Representatives Emanuel and Schakowsky for their steadfast support of making less expensive prescription drugs available to Illinois senior citizens," Governor Blagojevich said.

"Across the nation, Medicare beneficiaries have faced enormous obstacles in getting their prescription drugs," said Emanuel. "Here in Illinois, the Governor is working to solve these problems with his 'Illinois Cares Rx' program. He has created the nation's most comprehensive state response to filling the gaps created by Medicare Part D. He is

working to ensure that seniors in Illinois will have access to the prescription drugs they deserve."

"Illinois Cares Rx covers many of the gaps created by President Bush's Part D disaster. Governor Blagojevich and Illinois have done more than any other state to help beneficiaries. Our Governor is working to ensure that seniors and people with disabilities have access to the drugs their doctors prescribe," said Schakowsky. "I will continue to fight for a better Part D benefit that meets the needs of seniors and people with disabilities, not the drug and insurance companies."

The federal Medicare Modernization Act pays 75 percent of prescription drug costs up to \$2,250 after a \$250 deductible with an average \$32 per month premium. Beneficiaries are responsible for all of their costs between \$2,250 and \$5,100, with the plan paying 95 percent of costs beyond that top threshold. The gap where a beneficiary has to pay all the drug costs between \$2,250 and \$5,100 is commonly referred to as the "donut hole."

Gov. Blagojevich's Illinois Cares Rx program allows Illinois' low-income seniors and persons with disabilities who have been getting prescription drug assistance through state programs to avoid high out-of-pocket expenses and gaps in coverage created by the new Medicare Part D program.

The "wrap around coverage" provided to Illinois seniors and persons with disabilities through Illinois Cares Rx will help cover the increased costs of the Medicare program, including premium costs, coinsurance, coverage during the "donut," and the deductible.

To help Illinois seniors know how to avoid facing gaps in their coverage, nearly 35 Medicare Part D and Illinois Cares Rx enrollment events scheduled by the Illinois Department on Aging (IDoA), the Department of Healthcare and Family Services (HFS) and SHIP will continue through May 15th and the nearly 200 SHIP locations statewide are open with volunteers available to help guide enrollees through the application.

"Aging staff and the 13 Area Agencies on Aging across the state are still out in the communities answering last minute questions and concerns that people may have. We have extra people answering calls on our Senior HelpLine and there's a lot of important information on our department's website and on illinoisbenefits.org," IDoA Director Charles D. Johnson said. "Through interagency cooperation with HFS and SHIP, we've been able to enroll more than a million Illinoisans in some sort of prescription drug program."

Illinois seniors and persons with disabilities who want to find out if they are eligible for or enroll in the Illinois Cares Rx program, need assistance with Medicare Part D

enrollment or would like to know the nearest location of one of the over 200 SHIP offices, they should call the Department on Aging Help Line at 1-800-252-8966, the Senior Health Insurance Program at 1-800-548-9034 or visit http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?In_url=http://www.illinoisbenefits.org/ or http://www.house.gov/htbin/leave_site?In_url=http://www.idfpr.com/DOI/Ship/ship_volunteers.asp

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