

Press Release

JULY 21, 2005

DESPITE REPEATED INQUIRIES, BUSH ADMINISTRATION HOLDS COMMUNITY MEETING WITH TWO HOURS NOTICE

SCHAKOWSKY INVITES HHS SECRETARY LEAVITT TO MEET WITH HER CONSTITUENTS TO EXPLAIN MEDICARE DRUG BENEFIT

WASHINGTON, DC -- U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky today sent a letter to Secretary of Health and Human Services Mike Leavitt inviting him to speak with residents of the 9th Congressional District about the new Medicare prescription drug benefit. Secretary Leavitt is in Chicago today promoting the Bush Administration's new prescription drug benefit program.

Representative Schakowsky's office received a call with information on the Administration's event in Chicago only two hours in advance, despite having contacted the Department of Health and Human Services on Monday for information on any events in Chicago. Because two hours notice was insufficient for Representative Schakowsky to give notice to her constituents, who have continually raised questions, concerns, and suggestions about the drug benefit plan since it was signed into law, Representative Schakowsky invited Secretary Leavitt to hold an event in the 9th Congressional District that would allow for similar dialogue.

The text of Representative Schakowsky's letter to Secretary Leavitt is below:

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

□□□□□□□□□□□□ **As the implementation process for the new Medicare drug benefit nears, Medicare beneficiaries, their families and service providers are all attempting to understand the requirements and options that will be offered beginning this fall.□ As you know better than most, this is a tremendous undertaking that must be completed within an extremely short time.**

□□□□□□□□□□□□ **As part of that undertaking, you, CMS Director McClellan and other Administration officials have begun to travel the country to talk with consumers and others.□ It is my understanding that the purpose of these trips is to explain the new benefit, encourage beneficiaries to take advantage of the "extra assistance" subsidies, and listen to concerns.□□ Over the past months, I have received many, many questions, suggestions and complaints from my constituents about the new benefit.□ My staff is being trained to answer those questions and to be as helpful as possible in explaining the "extra" assistance benefits and the "dos and don'ts" of enrolling in the new drug plans.□ Therefore, I was pleased to hear that Chicago would be one of the stops on this taxpayer-funded tour so that my staff and my constituents could have an opportunity to hear directly from you.**

□□□□□□□□□□□□ **Unfortunately, although my chief of staff called the HHS Office of the Assistant Secretary for Legislation on Monday to ask for details on your trip to Chicago, my office was not notified until today that you would be holding a 30-minute Chicago Community Event at the Copernicus Senior Center this morning.□ Since this clearly did not give my staff or my constituents adequate time to arrange to attend, I would like to invite you to hold a forum in my district.□ I hope that you will take this invitation seriously, since I believe that my constituents have raised significant issues that would be extremely valuable in preparing them and your Department for the enrollment process.**

□□□□□□□□□□□□ **Finally, while the tour is in its early stages, several of my colleagues have indicated that they, too, received extremely limited notice about events being held in or near their districts.□ If forums are to be useful in reaching out to the affected communities and not just designed for press purposes, there must be adequate notice.□ This is particularly true since these issues are of such importance to Medicare beneficiaries and their families, who are likely to need extra time to arrange for transportation or caregiver responsibilities.□**

□□□□□□□□□□□□ **Again, I hope that you will agree to come to the 9th Congressional District for a community forum designed in a manner to allow a full discussion of the new drug**

benefit. I would be happy to discuss the timing of such an event or you can have your staff contact my chief of staff.

Sincerely,

S

Jan Schakowsky

Member of Congress