

**MAY 3, 2004 SCHAKOWSKY TO SENIORS/PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES:  
KNOW THE FACTS BEFORE BUYING**

**A NEW MEDICARE DRUG CARD CHICAGO, IL -** On the first day that Medicare beneficiaries can sign up for a Medicare-approved private discount drug card, U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) expressed concern that seniors and persons with disabilities could be making a decision to participate in this program without having all the facts. Schakowsky said seniors "should not drop their existing drug coverage for the discount card because it is not a prescription drug benefit under Medicare."

Schakowsky, who joined U.S. Senator Dick Durbin (D-IL) and U.S. Representative Rahm Emanuel (D-IL) at a Chicago pharmacy, warned seniors who may decide to enroll in the Medicare drug card plan that they would be locked into that one card for the full year. However, private companies that offer the drug card can change what drugs get discounts and the level of discounts from week to week.

Schakowsky said that getting the card is voluntary and added that seniors would continue to be responsible for paying 100% of the cost of their medication. The card would provide some savings on certain, but not all drugs.

According to a study by the Democratic staff of the House Government Reform Committee, on average, seniors would actually receive greater discounts:

- through current mail order plans like Costco.com or Drugstore.com;
- if the Bush Administration allowed drugs to be reimported from Canada;
- if Medicare was allowed to use its bargaining power to negotiate for lower drug prices, like the Veterans Administration.

For example, according to the government-run [www.Medicare.gov](http://www.Medicare.gov) website, a senior in Chicago who signs up for a Medicare drug card would pay between \$101.92 and \$129.44 for Zocor, depending on which card they choose. However, federal agencies like the Veterans Administration (VA) are able to negotiate a price of \$69.27 for the same drug.

Schakowsky and Durbin are the authors of the Medicare Prescription Drug Savings Act. The legislation will provide Medicare beneficiaries with greater choice, lower drug prices, the guarantee of uniform prescription drug benefits, and an important new choice - the ability to enroll in a Medicare-operated plan. The Medicare-operated plan will be able to obtain lower drug prices because it can use its bargaining power to negotiate for discounts, like the VA.

Below is Schakowsky's prepared text from today's news conference:

**STATEMENT OF U.S. REPRESENTATIVE SCHAKOWSKY (D-IL)**

**MEDICARE DISCOUNT CARD NEWS CONFERENCE  
MAY 3, 2004**

**"Thank you, Senator Durbin and Congressman Emanuel for your commitment to our seniors and persons with disabilities and for your leadership in fighting for a voluntary, comprehensive and affordable prescription drug plan under Medicare that will lower prices.**

**"What we have today, however, is an Administration that is not interested in lowering drug prices for seniors. Instead, the Bush Administration is spending taxpayer dollars on a political PR campaign to advertise a Medicare drug card that almost every senior and person with disability in Illinois is better off without. You will get better savings under Senior Care and the Illinois Buyer's Club."**

**"We are here today to tell every Medicare beneficiary in the state: Buyer Beware! Know your facts before you rush out and buy a Medicare drug card."**

**"It is important that seniors do not drop any existing drug coverage they may already have because the Medicare drug card is not an insurance policy; it is not a prescription drug benefit. What it is, however, is a confusing and ineffective plan that will not bring any real prescription drug relief to our seniors. Seniors are being swamped with information from private companies that offer these cards. That information describes the size of the discount and the drugs that are being covered."**

**"Is this what we really want for our seniors? A mail box stuffed with glossy brochures from drug companies - drug companies and HMOs trying to sell seniors a discount drug card that may offer them some savings, on some drugs, only some of the time.**

**"Seniors are getting a taste of what is yet to come under the Medicare drug law, and already, they are fed up. The only way we can bring seniors a real prescription drug benefit is to repeal the Republican Medicare drug law and replace it with a Medicare benefit that is simple and clear - a benefit that would actually bring our seniors relief at the pharmacy.**

**"There is no guarantee that the drugs that seniors need will be covered by the new Medicare drug cards. As a matter of fact, drug companies are calling all the shots. They decide what medicines are covered and when they are covered. Seniors are stuck with the card for one year, but private companies that offer the card can change what drugs get discounts and the level of discounts from week to week. If they drop the drug you signed up for or if you need a new prescription, well, that's just too bad.**

**"And the amount of the discount seniors get will vary pharmacy by pharmacy. Not all pharmacies will agree to provide discounts for every card. Even if they do, the amount**

of the discounts offered may not be the same at every pharmacy.

**"The Medicare drug card is not a solution to the skyrocketing prices of prescription drugs. Too many seniors have been priced out of the pharmacy and this drug card won't let them through the front door. A Medicare discount card may save them a dollar or two, but that doesn't mean much to a senior who can't afford the prescription in the first place.**

**"A senior in Chicago who signs up for a Medicare drug card would pay between \$101.92 and \$129.44 for Zocor, depending on which card they choose. However, federal agencies like the Veterans Administration (VA) are able to negotiate a price of \$69.27 for the same drug."**

**"That is why I have joined Senator Durbin in introducing the Medicare Prescription Drug Savings Act. The bill gives seniors and people with disabilities what they want, need and deserve - lower cost prescription drugs provided through Medicare and gives taxpayers the best deal by requiring Medicare to negotiate for the deepest discounts, much like the Veterans Administration. Medicare beneficiaries will get a guaranteed benefit that will always be there and will not change week by week. Seniors want lower drug prices through a Medicare-run plan and this bill would give them just that.**

**"But until we succeed in passing a real Medicare drug plan, we must counter the Republican propaganda machine led by President Bush, his Administration and leaders in the House and Senate. Seniors will not be fooled in believing that the Medicare drug cards are a solution to their rising drug prices and they will not rest until we pass a comprehensive, affordable drug plan under Medicare."**