

MARCH 16, 2004

**HOUSE DEMOCRATS CALL FOR IG INVESTIGATION INTO LATEST BUSH
ADMINISTRATION USE OF TAXPAYER DOLLARS
TO PROMOTE GOP MEDICARE LAW**

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WASHINGTON, D.C. - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined eight Congressional Democrats in calling for an investigation into the latest Bush Administration use of taxpayer dollars to promote the GOP Medicare law.

The members today released a letter to Health and Human Services (HHS) Acting Principal Deputy Inspector General Dara Corrigan expressing concern that "video news releases" distributed by HHS to television stations across the nation "are clearly intended to manipulate."

They added that these video news releases or VNRs "are intended to be used by local television news programs in an effort to continue to prop up the recently enacted Medicare law. We are even more concerned because the news report states that the Bush administration paid actors to pose as journalists and pharmacists in the video news releases, where they praise and promote the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003."

The General Accounting Office has already announced that it will "reopen its investigation into the legality of government-sponsored ads promoting the new Medicare prescription drug benefit. The nonpartisan investigative arm of Congress will look into whether the Medicare ad campaign violates a federal law prohibiting the government from disseminating "covert propaganda."

**(
Roll Call**

, Medicare Probe Relunched, 3/16/04)

Below is the full text of the letter:

March 16, 2004

Dara Corrigan
Acting Principal Deputy Inspector General
Department of Health and Human Services
Office of the Inspector General
330 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Ms. Corrigan:

□ We are writing to follow up on our letter of February 5th to request that you include in your investigation of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) involvement in a taxpayer-funded advertising campaign to promote the Administration's Medicare bill, a careful examination of the Administration's use of video news releases.□

□ Last week, the General Accounting Office (GAO) reported that, while not technically violating laws, the Administration's ad campaign promoting its Medicare bill had "notable weaknesses and other omissions," and, "this is not to say that the content is totally free of political tone."□ Coming on the heels of this report, these news releases raise serious new questions about the Administration's straightforwardness in promoting its Medicare bill.□ The purpose of public education campaigns should be to inform and educate, not to manipulate.□ In our view, these video news releases are clearly intended to manipulate.□ □

As the New York Times reported on March 15th, these segments are intended to be used by local television news programs in an effort to continue to prop up the recently enacted Medicare law.□ We are even more concerned because the news report states that the Bush administration paid actors to pose as journalists and pharmacists in the video news releases, where they praise and promote the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003.□ In addition, the video news releases show President Bush receiving a standing ovation as he signed the Medicare law on December 8th and fail to identify HHS as their source.□ In previous investigations, GAO has found editorials and newspaper articles written by government officials or government contractors that do not identify their source to be in violation of the restriction on using federal funds for political propaganda.

Further, in Monday's New York Times, Gary L. Kepplinter, the GAO deputy counsel, is quoted as saying, "We are actively considering some follow-up work related to the materials we received from the Department of Health and Human Services."□ In light of this remark, we respectfully request that you also pursue this "follow-up" work, and consider whether these video segments are sufficiently non-partisan and unbiased, and whether they represent an appropriate use of taxpayers' money.□ □

Sincerely,

□ _____ □ □ _____
□ **Rosa L. DeLauro** □ □ □ **Frank Pallone**
□ **Member of Congress** □ □ □ **Member of Congress**

□ _____ □ □ _____
□ **Sherrod Brown** □ □ □ **Bernie Sanders**
□ **Member of Congress** □ □ □ **Member of Congress**

□ _____ □ □ _____
□ **Tom Allen** □ □ □ **Marion Berry**
□ **Member of Congress** □ □ □ **Member of Congress**

□ _____ □ □ _____
□ **Jan Schakowsky** □ □ □ **Rahm Emanuel**
□ **Member of Congress** □ □ □ **Member of Congress**

□ _____ □ □ □
□ **Jim Davis** □ □ □ □
□ **Member of Congress**