

OCTOBER 14, 2003

SCHAKOWSKY: REPUBLICAN MEDICARE DRUG BILL IS PRESCRIPTION FOR DISASTER

**HUNDREDS OF THOUSANDS OF SENIORS
AND PERSONS WITH DISABILITIES IN ILLINOIS
TO PAY MORE UNDER GOP DRUG PROPOSALS**

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today warned seniors and persons with disability in Illinois not to believe the rhetoric from President Bush and Republicans in Congress about prescription drugs. Schakowsky pointed to a report released today by Citizen Action/Illinois and prepared by US Action, which found that Medicare beneficiaries in Illinois would have to pay more for their prescriptions drugs under bill being negotiated in Congress.

According to the report, under the Republican prescription drug proposals passed by the House and the Senate:

- **Between 424,482 and 509,378 seniors and persons with disabilities in Illinois would face an increase in their prescription drug prices.**
- **Almost 1.5 million Medicare beneficiaries would pay more to see their doctor.**
- **Between 199,422 and 230,582 retirees in Illinois would lose their current prescription drug coverage.**
- **More than 160,000 low-income seniors and persons with disabilities could see a rise in their prescription drug costs.**
- **The cost of lab visits and home health care services would rise for thousands.**

The title of the report is: *The Medicare Bait and Switch: Congress Promises to help Medicare beneficiaries by covering prescription drugs BUT Medicare beneficiaries in Illinois will pay more under proposed reforms!*

Below is Schakowsky's statement:

Statement of U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL)

October 14, 2003

On June 16, 2003, Governor Rod Blagojevich signed into law the Senior Citizens and Disabled Persons Prescription Drug Discount Program Act and 450,000 senior citizens and persons with disabilities will pay less for prescription drugs as a result.

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Illinois Citizen Action, the Alliance for Retired Americans, and senior citizens and persons with disabilities fought long and hard for this victory.□ Candidate Rod Blagojevich campaigned on lowering drug prices.□ And the Governor has kept his promise.□ He fought for and signed a bill that creates a landmark statewide group purchasing pool, recognizing that the bigger the buyer, the bigger the discount. And now he is taking on the drug companies by fighting for the right of U.S. consumers to get access to cheaper Canadian drugs through reimportation. Governor Blagojevich, like Illinois Citizen Action and the Alliance for Retired Americans, understands that we need to do everything possible to solve the crisis of high drug prices.

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Another candidate - George Bush - also campaigned on providing affordable drug coverage.□ But President Bush is not keeping that commitment. His proposals and the bills passed by the House and Senate last summer put the profit goals of the pharmaceutical industry first, and the needs of senior citizens and persons with disabilities last.□□□□

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Instead of following the Illinois group purchasing precedent, the House and Senate bills actually prohibit Medicare from negotiating for lower drug costs.□ Medicare would be prevented from taking any action to require affordable drug prices.□ And reimportation would be precluded.□ Because the Bush Administration is unwilling to take on the drug companies and would rather give an average annual tax cut of \$93,000 to millionaires than provide adequate funding for Medicare, senior citizens and persons with disabilities lose.

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This critical report points out graphically the problem with the House and Senate bills.□□

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200,000 Illinois retirees would lose their retiree benefits, after having worked their entire lives for the security of affordable health coverage.□□

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Half a million Illinois seniors and persons with disabilities would pay more in premiums and out-of-pocket costs than they would get back in benefits.

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Nearly 1.5 million people will pay more to go see their doctor because of increases in Part B premiums.

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Under the House bill, nearly 80,000 of those who need home health care would need more.

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The facts are clear.□ I will do whatever I can to make sure that every person has access to the drugs they need at a price they can afford.□ But, if the bills currently pending in Congress are enacted, Illinois senior citizens, persons with disabilities and their families will be worse off tomorrow than they are today.□ This report underscores what many of us believe about the Republican bill - fix it or nix it.