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SCHAKOWSKY AND WALGREENS DECLARE BUSH PRESCRIPTION DRUG CARD PLAN A SHAM NO SAVINGS OR CHOICE FOR SENIORS

CHICAGO, IL - U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today said that seniors will not be fooled by the Bush Administration's empty promises on prescription drug coverage. Schakowsky pointed to the Bush prescription drug card plan that falls well short of meeting the needs of the millions of seniors with little or no prescription coverage.

"Seniors are looking inside their empty medicine cabinets - no Lipitor for cholesterol, no Vioxx for arthritis, not even generic drugs. And the Bush solution - a prescription drug card that's not even worth its weight in plastic," Schakowsky said.

"The Bush Medicare drug card is not a benefit. It is nothing more than an empty promise to senior citizens. Seniors deserve a comprehensive, affordable, and voluntary prescription benefit under Medicare that controls the spiraling prices of drugs," Schakowsky added.

Walgreens executives joined Schakowsky at a news conference to expose the inadequacies of the Bush prescription drug plan, which would do little to help the 14 million seniors who lack drug coverage. Representatives from the Illinois Council of Senior Citizens also attended the event.

"Hear it from the experts at Walgreens who fill more prescriptions in the country than any other retailer: drug cards are not the answer for seniors on Medicare. The Bush cards would actually reduce choice, reduce access to pharmacists, and don't live up to their billing when it comes to saving you money," Schakowsky said.

"Senior citizens and persons with disabilities would pay 100 percent of the cost of drugs and there is no catastrophic or annual out-of-pocket limit under the card plan. And the Bush Medicare prescription drug cards don't provide real savings since they do nothing to reduce the actual price at the pharmaceutical company level," added Schakowsky, who pointed to studies from the U.S. General Accounting Office and others show that prescription drug cards provide minimal savings.

A recent GAO study found that discount cards do not significantly reduce prices to consumers. Savings averaged about 10% compared to retail price. The GAO also examined five discount card mail order prices and found that 10-mg of Lipitor cost between \$50.04 and \$53.11. But when the federal government uses its bargaining power on behalf of veterans, the same drug costs \$34.68. Using the bargaining power of Medicare would provide real saving for seniors and real discount from the pharmaceutical companies.

"The Bush plan would divide Medicare enrollees into numerous private prescription benefit management programs which will reduce choice. Discount plans can restrict the drugs covered to one per class of drugs or to drugs manufactured by a certain manufacturer, even if a physician prescribes a different drug. Under the original Bush administration proposal, seniors would be limited to one card only," Schakowsky said.

She added, "Prescription drug cards can reduce access to pharmacists. Discount card companies could push senior citizens into using mail order options. Many senior citizens rely on their community pharmacist to provide counseling and guard against possible problems arising from multiple drug use."

Schakowsky concluded, "Seniors are not going to stand for this sham. They want a real prescription drug plan that ensures that their medicine cabinet is never without the prescription they need."