

## REPRESENTATIVE SCHAKOWSKY JOINS NATIONAL CAMPAIGN FOR HEALTH AND SOCIAL SECURITY

**CHICAGO, IL** U.S. Representative Jan Schakowsky (D-IL) today joined Illinois Citizen Action, members of Congress, Illinois lawmakers, and health care advocates to launch a national drive for health and social security. The national grassroots campaign is geared towards ensuring that Congress passes the Patients' Bill of Rights, HR 358, real managed care reform legislation.

Schakowsky also signed a "Health Security Pledge" supporting patients' rights and prescription drug coverage for Medicare beneficiaries and opposing turning Medicare over to the HMOs and privatizing Social Security.

"The Congressional leadership strategy on managed care reform is straight out of the HMOs play-book delay, delay, delay. This may have worked in the past, but not any more. Passing the Patients' Bill of Rights is a top priority for me, many of my congressional colleagues, and millions of HMO members," Schakowsky said.

HR 358 would set quality standards for HMOs and other insurers, ensure that medical professionals make health care decisions and not HMO bureaucrats, and guarantee that HMOs can be held accountable for their decisions in a court of law.

Schakowsky said that last week many Medicare HMOs announced that they would pull out of the market, abandoning one quarter of a million senior citizens and people with disabilities. Many HMOs staying in Medicare said that they would raise premiums and cut benefits.

Karen Ignagni, the head of the American Association of Health Plans, thinks the reason for Medicare HMOs pulling out of the market is that they were not being paid enough. "Overpaid plans don't leave the program. Overpaid plans don't cut benefits to beneficiaries," she said. But a General Accounting Office report found that Medicare HMOs were overpaid by \$1.3 billion in 1998 and that "annual excess payments will increase each year."

"HMOs want more money, plain and simple. HMOs are saying, pay us way more than we are worth if you want us to deliver any services at all. And these are the same HMOs fighting managed care reform legislation in Congress. That is just absurd," Schakowsky added.