

Walgreen execs hit Bush Rx proposal Chicago Sun-Times

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By GARY WISBY STAFF REPORTER

President Bush's idea for a prescription drug discount card would hurt the bottom line of pharmacies while failing to provide real savings for senior citizens, Walgreen Co. executives said Tuesday.

"Our net profit is 3 cents on the dollar," Walgreen executive Phil Burgess said at a news conference in a Michigan Avenue drugstore. "The manufacturers' profit is 18 to 19 cents on the dollar."

He was supported by Rep. Jan Schakowsky (D-Ill.), who said of the Bush discount card, "It's not even worth its weight in plastic."

Use of the card would reduce choice and limit access to pharmacists, the congresswoman said, pointing to a General Accounting Office study showing minimal savings under five similar plans already available.

The GAO study found that savings averaged 10 percent compared with the retail prices of drugs.

The savings "come directly out of the hide of the pharmacist," rather than drug manufacturers, Schakowsky said.

Pearline Atkins, 66, said her two medications cost almost half of her income before she had to give up one of them. "I spent my life savings on medicine," the former Chicago Board of Education employee said.

"We are working for a benefit under Medicare as the only reasonable alternative," Schakowsky said.

The Bush proposal was unveiled months ago but has failed to advance. Officials at Deerfield-based Walgreen Co. are speaking out now because "we think Bush is primed to come out with a new proposal that is very similar to the old proposal," Burgess said.

