

## Larson Brings Medicare Experts Together To Educate Seniors

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 27, 2000

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WEST HARTFORD – In an effort to educate senior citizens about the current debate over how to modernize the Medicare program, U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today brought together experts from local health care organizations, and state legislative leaders to discuss this important topic with the public.

Highlighting the forum panel was Craig Schnieder, a health care specialist from the Health Care Financing Administration (HCFA) Boston Regional Office. HCFA is responsible for administering the Medicare program.

Also on the panel were State Rep. Mary Eberle (D-15), Chair of the Public Health Committee; Gregg Johnson, Medicare Outreach, United Healthcare Part B; Ellen Rothman, Visiting Nurses Association Health Care, Inc.; Toni Fatone, President, Connecticut Association of Healthcare Facilities; Joe Coatsworth, Vice President of Government Relations, Connecticut Hospital Association; and Hilary Dalin, Attorney, Area Agency on Aging and Center for Medicare Advocacy, Inc.

Speaking at the forum, which was held at the West Hartford Town Hall Auditorium, Larson stated, "From the hundreds of letters that I receive in my office every week, I know that seniors are concerned about the proposed changes to the Medicare program. It is my hope that this forum will educate people about the different proposals that are being suggested in this important debate. As I have often stated during this past year, reforming Medicare is one of the most critical issues that Congress must address in order to ensure that quality and affordable healthcare is provided to seniors."

The forum's panel of experts focused primarily on the two main proposals that Congress will likely be reviewing during the next months: the plan suggested by the Administration and the Breaux-Thomas proposal. Maintaining the basics of the present Medicare system, the President's plan would include as a featured component a new, voluntary Medicare drug benefit. Called Medicare Part D, it would offer all beneficiaries for the first time, access to affordable, high quality prescription drug coverage beginning in 2002. In contrast, the Breaux-Thomas proposal would change the current structure of Medicare and would offer an immediate drug benefit for low income seniors.

Concerning the issue of prescription drug coverage for seniors, during this past year Larson has been at the forefront of the fight to help seniors have access to affordable prescription drugs. In May, 1999, he released a report he requested from the U.S. House Committee on Government Reform. The report found that senior citizens in the First Congressional District are charged far more for their prescription drugs than drug companies' favored customers, such as the federal government, health maintenance organizations, and the large insurance companies.

The findings of a second report, Larson again requested from the Government Reform Committee, were released in

December, 1999. It noted that seniors in the district would find the cost of their prescription drugs drastically reduced if they were purchased in either Canada or Mexico.

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