

Prescription Drugs

America has over 40 million elderly and disabled Americans who rely on prescription medication to maintain their way of life. Over the past few years, prescription drug costs have skyrocketed and I believe a prescription drug benefit plan for seniors is long overdue.

Unfortunately, the Medicare Prescription Drug, Improvement, and Modernization Act (MMA) signed into law by the President, P.L. 108-173, does little to help seniors. It does not address the astronomical cost of prescription drugs, leaves a huge coverage gap, and penalizes those who do not sign up before May 15, 2006.

To help seniors with the Medicare and prescription drugs, I have introduced the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act (H.R. 2685) (more in depth) to allow the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate directly with pharmaceutical companies to achieve discounts for Medicare beneficiaries. I've also introduced the Medicare Prescription Drug Flexibility for Seniors Act (H.R. 4410) to extend the initial enrollment period by 2 years, allow beneficiaries to change plans if the plan sponsors alters its formulary, and penalizes retirement health plans that provide misleading information about their coverage. Finally, if the federal government isn't allowed to negotiate on behalf of its citizens, I support prescription drug importation so seniors can go elsewhere to obtain less expensive medicine.

During the 109th Congress, I cosponsored a number of bills to amend MMA, including:

- the Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act (H.R. 752) to create a nationwide prescription drug plan to be run by the Secretary of Health and Human Services;
- the Medicare Informed Choice Act (H.R. 3861) to extend the deadline for choosing a plan until the end of 2006;
- the Medicare Prescription Drug Emergency Guarantee Act (H.R. 4685) to increase seniors' ability to change plans and reimburse states and entities which covered the cost of drugs during the initial enrollment period;
- the Medicare Drug Formulary Protection Act (H.R. 5102) to prevent prescription drug plans from removing a drug from their formulary until the open enrollment period;
- the Choice for America's Seniors Act (H.R. 5116)

to extend the initial enrollment period by 6 months, suspend the late enrollment fee for 2006, permit beneficiaries to change enrollment once a year, and prevent arbitrary changes in formularies.

House Democrats promised that within the first 100 hours of the 110th Congress, we would pass prescription drug relief. On January 12, 2007, the House passed the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act, H.R. 4 to repeal the current law prohibiting the Secretary of Health and Human Services from negotiating with drug companies for lower prices for seniors enrolled in Medicare drug plans. Not only will it repeal the prohibition, it will require the Secretary to conduct these negotiations and report back to Congress about his progress. It passed the House with a bipartisan vote of 255 to 170.

Since the creation of MMA, I've commissioned a number of studies to determine its effects on beneficiaries in the First Congressional District:

- New Medicare Drug Plans Fail to Provide Meaningful Drug Price Discounts in Greater Hartford
- Medicare Drug Cards Provide Few Discounts in Connecticut's 1st Congressional District

You may also be interested in reading an op-ed I wrote after the passage of MMA: Privatization Plan Masquerading as a Drug Benefit.

Congressman Larson has held dozens of forums throughout the First Congressional District from 2003 to present to discuss the cost of prescription drugs and the creation and implementation of the new Medicare prescription drug benefit.