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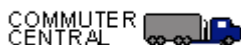
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Top Stories

Congressman Larson calls prescription drug law an 'outrage'

By: Ted Glanzer , Staff Writer

08/19/2004

Calling the new law an "outrage," U.S. Rep. John B. Larson (D-1st District, CT) took the Medicare reform/prescription drug law to task at the Rocky Hill Senior Center on Aug. 18.

Larson called the new law - which offers 33 different prescription drug cards to choose from - "cumbersome" and "confusing."

Larson said that there was not much of a difference between some of the new Medicare prescription cards and the savings offered by Drugstore.com.

Illustrating his point, Larson said that a 30-day supply of the 10 highest-selling drugs purchased seniors in the district and the nation costs \$1,036.61 on one of the new Medicare prescription cards.

"That is \$75 more than Drugstore.com," Larson said. "After all of the advertising, all of the money spent and creation of 33 cards, Drugstore.com costs less."

"The great irony is, that when you purchase this card, you are locked in for a year," Larson said. "The pharmaceutical companies can change the prices [of the drugs they offer] on a weekly basis.

"I've called the bill . . . the privatization of Medicare masquerading as prescription drug relief."

Larson said that the new law, which does not take full effect until 2006, prohibits the U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services from negotiating directly with the pharmaceutical companies for lower prescription drug costs.

"That is a moral outrage," Larson said, noting that permitting such an

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arrangement would result in far greater savings for senior citizens.

"The VA commissioner negotiates with pharmaceutical companies," Larson said. "Why aren't we doing that for the 40 million Medicare recipients? It's a matter of greed placing the needs of pharmaceutical companies over the agenda of the American people."

Equally outrageous, Larson said, was the "unprecedented" process by which the Medicare reform law passed the House of Representatives.

According to Larson, the bill was initially rejected when it came up for a vote at 3 a.m. The voting machines were left open, however, and the bill passed by one vote later that morning at 6 a.m., when the media was unavailable to report on the issue.

Larson also said that the new law should have permitted the "reimportation" of drugs, calling the pharmaceutical companies' concerns over FDA approval unfounded.

Any drugs brought into the country would have had to meet FDA approval and had to be FDA manufactured, Larson said, noting that there had not been one health incident reported by citizens purchasing drugs in Canada in the one million plus transactions that had taken place to date.

"Did you ever think you'd be a refugee of your own country to get prescription drugs?" Larson asked.

Larson said that he has been approached by senior citizens who would appreciate a better prescription drug benefit over receiving the accolade of being called members of "The Greatest Generation."

Judith Stein, an attorney from the nonpartisan Center of Medicare Advocacy, said that experts in her office (800-262-4414) are available for seniors who want help in wading through the complicated new Medicare law.

"The question is, do you want all of this choice?" Stein asked. "People throw up their hands and not making a choice at all . . . If it's not better for you, you need to let your congressman know."

"One of the problems with the new law is great confusion," Stein said, noting that the information provided by the government about the Medicare reform law was disseminated only via an 800 number and the Internet.


Only five of the approximately 20 meeting attendees had access to the Internet; only two of the five actually obtained information from the government's website.

Stein said that her organization has been pushing for the government to mail detailed information about the new law to senior citizens.

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