

Congressman Brady Condemns Pay to Play Medicare Bill (11/24/03)

WASHINGTON, D.C. - Denouncing the Medicare conference report, Congressman Robert A. Brady (D., Pa.) said today he voted against the Republicans' plan to privatize Medicare because it doesn't do enough to control the rising costs of prescription drugs, privatizes Medicare and will result in 2.7 million retirees losing their existing health care coverage.

Brady who opposed the bill on the House floor said the bill would pump billions of dollars into the coffers of the HMOs and drug companies, further increases the historically high Bush deficit and doesn't even guarantee lower drug costs for seniors. "The bill leaves millions of seniors without any drug benefit at all. And, just to make matters worse, the inadequate relief it does provide doesn't go into effect until 2006."

Congressman Brady said that in addition to denying coverage to millions of seniors and passing on the price tag to future generations, the process by which the conference report passed was a blatant hijacking of the democratic process. "Instead of providing a guaranteed, defined prescription drug benefit available to Medicare recipients, in the middle of the night Republicans put the special interests of HMOs and mega drug companies before the interests of seniors and the disabled."

Congressman Brady also charged that the voting process was virtually an unprecedented exclusion of a minority party. "First Tom Delay and the GOP leadership refused to include Democrats in negotiations to reconcile differing House and Senate Medicare Bills. Then, after losing the vote 218-216, the Republican leadership held open the 15 minute vote for a record three hours while they threatened and bought off GOP dissenters. They went against all the rules and against the will of the American people, especially our senior citizens."

The bill passed by House Republicans, which is scheduled to take effect in 2006, prohibits Medicare from negotiating lower drug prices and blocks re-importation of drugs from other countries at lower prices. In addition, 2.7 million seniors will lose their retiree prescription drug coverage; up to 6.4 million of the poorest Medicare beneficiaries will get less drug coverage than they have now; and millions of seniors will see their Medicare premiums rise if they refuse to give up their doctor and join an HMO.

Congressman Brady added that the Republican prescription drug plan lets millions of America's seniors fall through the Medicare safety net. Even though the bill requires seniors to pay premiums year-round, its \$2,850 gap in coverage hurts the middle class and leaves many seniors without coverage for part of the year. It will add to the number of uninsured by spending \$6.7 billion on ineffective health

savings accounts for the wealthy, while six million low-income seniors who get additional assistance from Medicaid will pay more for their prescriptions.

The Senate is expected to vote on the same bill in the coming days. If it is defeated in the Senate it will be returned to conference where Democrats should be allowed to participate, where they will fight for an affordable, guaranteed, defined prescription drug benefit for all seniors under Medicare.