

(November 30, 2005) Lipinski Fights to Give Seniors More Time To Sign Up For Medicare Drug Plans

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To Sign Up For Medicare Drug Plans

Citing Confusion of Medicare Drug Benefit Plans, Lipinski Sponsors Bill To Help

WASHINGTON, DC - Today, U.S. Representative Dan Lipinski called for Medicare beneficiaries to be given more time to navigate through the dozens of confusing Medicare drug plans so they can choose a plan that best meets their needs.

Lipinski announced he is a cosponsor of legislation that would give seniors and people with disabilities a full year to choose a Medicare drug plan. This bill, the Medicare Informed Choice Act, would delay a late-enrollment penalty, prevent beneficiaries from losing their employer-based coverage, and allow seniors to switch plans if they make a mistake.

"I have met with seniors and other Medicare beneficiaries all over the district, and they tell me about how they are faced with a mountain of prescription drug bills and a growing stack of glitzy brochures from insurance companies looking for new customers," Lipinski said. "Our seniors deserve a less confusing, less expensive prescription drug plan. The least we can do is give them more time to understand their options to make the best choice."

In the Cook County alone, senior citizens and people with disabilities will have to choose from more than 60 plans. Unfortunately, recent studies have shown most beneficiaries do not understand the program. Additionally, the Administration sent incorrect information to beneficiaries, and now the Department of Health and Human Services tells seniors to use the web, even though 75% of seniors don't use the Internet.

Under current law, most Medicare beneficiaries must sign up for a drug plan by May 15th, 2006. Beneficiaries will be charged a late enrollment penalty if they choose to enroll at a later date. Also, once someone signs up for a plan, most beneficiaries will be unable to change plans until 2007, while plans can change the benefits they offer once they give 60 days' notice.

Congressman Lipinski is continuing to offer a series of informational sessions across the 3rd District to help ease the burden of choosing a drug plan. For more information call the Congressman's office at 312-886-0481.

"No one should feel pressured into making a bad decision," Lipinski added. "Given the current confusion it is imperative we allow beneficiaries to take their time, check their facts, and know their options without being rushed to choose."