



*News from Congressman Jim Cooper  
U.S. House of Representatives, TN-05*

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact: Greg Hinote, 615-736-5295 or 202-225-4311

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**COOPER JOINS IN INTRODUCING MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG BENEFIT**

*Calls Benefit a Top Priority for Tennesseans*

NASHVILLE, TENN. — Rep. Jim Cooper along with other House Democrats introduced legislation today that, if passed, will create a no-premium, universal prescription drug benefit for all Medicare Part B enrollees.

“Introduction of this legislation, the Medicare Rx Now Act of 2003, is exciting progress and provides real hope to Medicare recipients who can’t afford the high costs of their prescriptions,” said Cooper in unveiling the plan.

The legislation provides an affordable benefit that can be implemented within the Medicare program and ensures that all seniors receive relief. After years of congressional inaction on this issue, Cooper and his fellow Democrats have finally created fiscally-responsible legislation that provides people with real savings and is easy to understand.

Under the bill, recipients with annual income levels above 200% of the federally designated poverty level would receive benefits through pre-negotiated and Medicare-approved prescription drug card plans. More than 58% of Tennessee’s current Medicare recipients, who earn below 200% of the federal poverty level, would be eligible for additional benefits with a three-tiered co-payment system on preferred, non-preferred and generic brands. Once a beneficiary reaches a total drug cost limit — not just out-of-pocket expense — of over \$4000, Medicare would pay 80% of costs for the remainder of the year.

The plan also shields states from being forced to absorb catastrophic drug costs of individual beneficiaries. In Tennessee, if a person receiving both Medicare and TennCare reaches the \$4000 limit, the state will be reimbursed at 80% of the recipient’s drug costs, greatly alleviating its cost burden associated with providing expensive medicines to individuals.

“This prescription drug benefit is achievable during this Congress and it is affordable,” Cooper said. “More importantly, it meets the needs of the thousands of Medicare beneficiaries here at home who are in desperate need of help in paying for their medications. Democrats and Republicans must support this bill now so that we can end this crisis for our nation’s senior citizens. I expect wide-spread support for approval of this bill and I will be relentless in getting it passed in Congress.”

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