

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE RAHM EMANUEL
1319 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Contact: Cecelia Prewett
Office: 202-226-7639 Cell: 202-225-1787
cecilia.prewett@mail.house.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 2, 2003

WASHINGTON, D.C. – U.S. Representative Rahm Emanuel (D-IL) delivered this statement at a press conference unveiling the centrist Democrats prescription drug plan

Thank you, Cal, and also to my colleagues here today. I am proud to stand with you today as we propose a meaningful and fiscally responsible Medicare prescription drug benefit. It is difficult, in this time of war, with ongoing threats to our national security, and rising deficits, to focus on our domestic priorities. But we must.

Seniors need help on their budget, and the government needs help on their budget. We have a plan that does that. As a member of the Budget Committee, I think that any prescription drug legislation, to be considered seriously, must take into account the difficult political and fiscal conditions we face. This bill was constructed as an important first step towards providing America's seniors with comprehensive drug benefits, in a time of rising budget deficits.

There are benefits for ALL seniors in this package, and it fully protects seniors facing catastrophic drug costs. Does it do everything we'd like? No, but it gets us a long way down the road. It doesn't bust the budget, and is far more workable than other proposals.

This bill protects all seniors from skyrocketing drug costs by covering almost all costs after an individual spends \$4,000 on drugs. This \$4,000 includes not only out-of-pocket expenses, but also pre-discount costs, and costs covered by retiree coverage. In addition, all seniors will have access to a drug card providing discounts on almost any drug they purchase, to ensure savings for all seniors, even those without very high drug costs.

This bill gets the job done without blowing the budget. And while the President certainly has *not* done his part to keep budget deficits down, we reach out to him by using only funds allocated for a Medicare drug benefit in his budget proposal. Unlike the Republican proposal, which offers comprehensive drug coverage to seniors who opt for often-risky private drug plans; this bill uses these funds to provide a plan giving security to all seniors. It's just plain irresponsible to force seniors into enrollment in an untested system of private, drug-only insurance plans in order to receive meaningful coverage.

Still, while it costs about the same, our proposal is very different from the Republican proposal. Unlike that plan, our proposal gives real security to all seniors. Unlike the President's plan where many seniors would have to make choices between keeping the coverage they now have and trust, or receive a comprehensive drug benefit; our plan expands on a program that works by building on the Medicare Part B program.

By providing a benefit that fits well within the FY 2004 budget proposal in conference this week, this bill represents a common sense first step which can be easily made more generous in times of greater economic stability. Ours is a plan that combines the fiscal limits of the President's plan with a meaningful benefit that does not force seniors to give up their traditional Medicare benefit.

Because it provides needed coverage while not busting the budget, it's a good compromise proposal that can be supported by Democrats and Republicans. We ought to accomplish what we can today for millions of desperate seniors. Under a different economy -- and a different President -- we can come back and do the rest.

###