

January 12, 2007 - Slaughter Applauds Democratic Medicare Bill as Victory for Seniors

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Slaughter Applauds Democratic Medicare Bill as Victory for Seniors
New Congress Moves Away from Corruption of 109th

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today applauded the passage of H.R. 4, the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act of 2007. The bill was a prominent part of the Democrats "Six for '06" campaign platform, and will require the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services (H.H.S) to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices for Medicare recipients.

The legislation passed by a final vote of 255 to 170.

"The Medicare Part D bill authored by the last Congress was a glaring example of the corrupt legislation produced by a corrupted legislative process," Rep. Slaughter said. "Democrats have already passed new House rules to stamp out corruption at its source. Today, we acted to undue the damage previously done to America's seniors. It's all part of giving Americans a Congress they can be proud of again."

CORRECTING CORRUPTION FROM A PAST CONGRESS

In the 108th Congress, the means by which the Medicare Part D bill (H.R.1) was authored and passed exemplified how the legislative process had become corrupted in recent years. Below is a brief summary of some of the more objectionable abuses which occurred during and in the days leading up to the bill's passage:

- Denying Adequate Time to Review Legislation: When H.R. 1 first came to the House floor on June 26, 2003, the rule (H. Res. 299) made in order only one of the 59 amendments Democratic and Republican Members had brought to the Rules Committee for consideration. While the Senate considered the bill over a period of two weeks, and debated and voted on more than 30 amendments, House Republican leaders forced lawmakers to vote on the bill in a matter of hours. Furthermore, the version of H.R. 1 that Republican leaders forced the House to consider on June 26th was not available until early that morning.

- Abuses of Voting Time: On the night of November 21, 2003, voting on the Medicare Proscription Drug and Modernization Act, scheduled for 15 minutes, was held open for over three hours so that enough votes could be found for the legislation to pass.

- Shutting out the Minority Party during the Conference Process: On one occasion during the conference process, two Democratic conferees working on the bill, Congressmen Charlie Rangel and Marion Berry, had been barred entry to a conference meeting.

- Negotiating Sweetheart Deals with the Pharmaceutical Industry While Writing the Bill: One of the most influential conferees, Commerce Committee Chairman Billy Tauzin (R-LA), had probably been negotiating a \$2 million per year job as the top lobbyist for the drug industry while he had been writing the bill. Joining Tauzin as a lobbyist for the pharmaceutical industry was John McManus, the top Republican staff person on the Ways and Means Health

Subcommittee, who had been deeply involved in writing the Medicare legislation.

BACKGROUND ON H.R. 4

H.R. 4 bipartisan bill repeals a provision in the current law that prohibits the Secretary of HHS from negotiating with drug companies and, instead, requires such negotiations to take place. Unlike the individual States, Fortune 500 companies and even the Department of Veterans Affairs, Medicare is the only major health care entity in this country that cannot bargain for lower prices.

President Bush has threatened to veto the bill, despite the broad support it has received from both Congress and the American public. A recent Newsweek poll showed that over 92 percent of respondents supported giving Medicare the power to negotiate for better prices.

Along with H.R. 4, Democrats have also succeeded in passing bills to raise the minimum wage, to allow federal funding of stem cell research, and to implement strict new ethics rules for Members of Congress.

Provisions of the Bipartisan Prescription Drug Negotiating Authority Bill (H.R.4)

- The bill (H.R. 4) provides the HHS Secretary broad discretion on how to best implement the negotiating authority, to achieve the most significant price discounts for Medicare beneficiaries.

- The bill continues to prohibit the HHS Secretary from requiring a particular formula (i.e., a list of covered drugs) to be used by Medicare prescription drug plans and also from limiting access to any prescription medication.

- It is a requirement of the HHS Secretary to submit to the appropriate congressional committees a report of negotiations, not later than June 1, 2007, and every six months thereafter.

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