

Medicare Maladies

A Series that Exposes the Dangerous Elements of the Medicare Bill currently in Committee

MM #2: Congress Above The Law (Or At Least Medicare Reform)

Members of Congress apparently don't want to taste their own Medicare medicine.

Lawmakers recently passed separate Medicare bills mandating specific prescription drug plans for all seniors. But afterwards, the House approved a bill (H.R. 2631) that will guarantee federal retirees - including retired members of Congress - the prescription drug benefits they already receive from their private health plans.

That means if the bills become law, every federal retiree will be exempt from the limited plans the rest of us will have to live with.

So much for government "of the people, by the people, for the people."

It's no wonder lawmakers want to protect their choices. If either the House or Senate version of the Medicare bills becomes law, about one out of every three private-sector retirees would lose the drug coverage their former employer provides, according to the Congressional Budget Office. This means they would be dumped into the new government-run drug benefit plan with significantly poorer benefits and higher out-of-pocket costs, as Heritage Foundation health care experts Robert Moffit and Derek Hunter point out.

They also note the exemption bill shows just how bad the Medicare reform bills really are. "Members of Congress must return to the drawing board and draft real Medicare reform. If these costly, but inferior, drug benefit plans aren't good enough for the politicians, they're not good enough for the rest of us either," says Moffit.

For more information, e-mail chris.kennedy@heritage.org or call Heritage Media Services at (202) 675-1761.

("Medicare Maladies is a regular feature, launched 7/14/03, from The Heritage Foundation. Sad to say, there's another malady coming your way tomorrow. Daily "maladies" are also available at www.heritage.org.)