

# Medicare Maladies

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

## MM #33: A Modest Proposal for the Drug Bill Deadlock

The road to adding a prescription drug benefit to Medicare is getting bumpier.

*The New York Times* reports Aug. 27 that legislative negotiations to offer prescription drugs to Medicare patients have been stalled because of squabbling between two key lawmakers.

The House and the Senate passed separate versions of the drug proposals in June and a Capitol Hill committee has been trying to iron out the differences. But, as the *Times* notes, “agreements have been elusive, even on issues listed as noncontroversial.”

The Heritage Foundation won't go into the politics of the matter. We will, however, get into the policy. And one of our policy recommendations for these bills is this: Start over again.

Sure, some provisions are worth keeping, such as a House proposal to have competing health plans in Medicare (though not until 2010!). But overall the Medicare drug bills are “full of nasty surprises,” according to Heritage health-care expert Robert Moffit. Take this one: The Congressional Budget Office estimates the Senate bill would lead more than 4 million retirees to lose the private drug coverage they now enjoy and be dumped into Medicare.

Moffit suggests lawmakers take a step back and start again, this time speeding up reforms based on the successful Federal Employee Health Benefits Program (FEHBP). The program offers patient choice (and prescription drugs) to 9 million federal employees and retirees.

You can read lots more about FEHBP and Medicare reform at [heritage.org](http://heritage.org).

For more information or to receive an e-mail version of “Medicare Maladies,” contact [medicaremaladies@heritage.org](mailto:medicaremaladies@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 on [heritage.org](http://heritage.org).)