

Medicare Maladies

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

MM #65: We'll Finish By July. No, Wait. The Fall. No, Wait...

Today marks the deadline for lawmakers to finish work on a bill that will offer prescription drugs to all Medicare patients as an entitlement.

But it looks like they won't make it. Again.

Oct. 17 is just the latest in a series of deadlines lawmakers have set for themselves to work out the differences between a House and Senate Medicare bill and send to President Bush. One of the earliest was July 4. Then it was before Congress' August recess. Then by Labor Day.

Perhaps this is a good thing. With 44 million current Medicare patients and 77 million baby boomers planning to use Medicare starting in the next decade, this isn't the time for lawmakers to slap something together, ship it to the White House and hope for the best.

Rather, they should have three key requirements in mind, according to The Heritage Foundation: The first is not creating an open-ended universal drug entitlement. Nearly 78 percent of seniors already have prescription drug coverage so it's not needed. The second is don't increase the burden on future generations. The \$400 billion earmarked for the next 10 years is just the tip of the iceberg and will be dwarfed when baby boomers start retiring. The third? Base real Medicare reform on the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program. It's the best model to change Medicare for the better, and it's already in the House bill so there's something for lawmakers to go on. These guidelines may create a longer wait for a bill, but it will be worth it.

Read more about how to reform Medicare the right way at heritage.org.

For more information or to receive an e-mail version of "Medicare Maladies," contact 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.)

