

# Medicare Maladies

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

## MM #70: Senator, Call Your Home Office (And Health Plan)

Competing health plans can work in North Dakota. Someone just needs to explain that to one of the state's senators, Kent Conrad.

Conrad, in an Oct. 23 interview with *The New York Times* about the Medicare prescription drug debate on Capitol Hill, declared: "The competition model just doesn't work in my part of the country."

Actually, it does. As Heritage Foundation health-care expert Nina Owcharenko points out, there are 13 health plans available in North Dakota for federal workers, retirees and spouses through the Federal Employee Health Benefits Program or FEHBP. That means every current or retired postal worker, federal judge, park ranger and Border Patrol agent has access to this plan, which offers prescription drugs, patient choice and access to doctors in the state of 634,000. Even Conrad's staff in North Dakota is covered under the plan.

Perhaps Conrad forgot, and that's almost understandable. FEHBP has been around since 1960, five years before Medicare. Conrad has been a senator since 1986. So for him to note FEHBP coverage is like a fish noting the water he's swimming in: It's covered everyone so well for so long, he probably doesn't notice it anymore.

That's too bad. If Conrad and other lawmakers noticed FEHBP more, they would find a model to offer prescription drugs through Medicare that works everywhere. Even North Dakota.

Read more about FEHBP 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).)