

# Medicare Maladies

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

## MM #81: Dinner's On Me (But You Can't Order *That*)

Imagine your friends treating you to the best restaurant in town.

But as you look at the menu, they tell you what you can and can't have on their dime.

You can have the roast beef, but not the filet mignon. A beer, but not a glass of wine.

It's then you realize that you probably would've been better off eating at home.

This is what's happening to many retirees as Congress works on a Medicare bill to send to President Bush. Last summer, Congress proposed to cover all 40 million Medicare patients by enrolling them in a prescription drug entitlement program, regardless of income or need.

It sounded attractive. But then the caveats arrived: If Congress created a universal entitlement program, analysts noted, employers would drop coverage for about 4 million retirees and dump them into the inferior government plan. Then there's the cost. The Congressional Budget Office says the Senate version of the drug plan could be as much as \$432 billion in the first 10 years. The Heritage Foundation says it could be \$2 *trillion* by 2030.

This mess could have been avoided had lawmakers thought before treating. "The Medicare drug debate has been long and tortuous, in large part because the fundamental issues were largely ignored in the rush to enact a politically popular benefit," write Heritage health policy and budget experts in a Nov. 7 research paper.

Some treat. The nation might just get a horrible case of indigestion from it.

Read more of the Nov. 7 research paper 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).)