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Rep. Barrow Urges Congress to Extend Enrollment Period for New Medicare Drug Plan

Barrow says that America's seniors deserve more time, without penalty, to get the information and facts they need to select the plan that's right for them

Washington, DC – Georgia Congressman John Barrow (12th District) today called on his colleagues in the House of Representatives to immediately consider a bill (H.R. 3861) that would extend the enrollment deadline for the new Medicare Prescription Drug Plan, and suspend the late enrollment penalties written into the law that created the program. Barrow joined other members of Congress in signing on to a discharge petition, a move that would force an immediate debate and vote on the bill.

“I’ve has received calls and letters from seniors all across the District who are confused by the sheer number of plans and options available in this prescription drug program,” Barrow said, referring to the roughly three dozen private drug plans that recipients can choose from. “They’re worried about not choosing the plan that’s right for them or, even worse, getting penalized if they don’t sign up in time. Congress needs to extend the deadline and remove the penalties before we head home this year.”

Congress is expected to remain in session throughout the weekend and possibly into next week. Once they adjourn, the House of Representatives is not scheduled to meet again until the end of January.

The new Medicare Prescription Drug Plan passed Congress by a razor-thin margin in 2003 – more than a year before Barrow was elected to the House of Representatives. Under the law, beneficiaries who wish to enroll are required to sign up for the new prescription drug program no later than May 15, 2006. Those who fail to do so will be unable to enroll again until November 15, 2006. A delayed enrollment will cause the premium cost of the selected plan to go up at least 1% per month for every month that the beneficiary waits to join (*Source: [Medicare Website](#)*).

“Even people with a Ph.D. don’t understand the prescription drug plans out there,” Barrow said. “Now’s the time to fix what’s wrong with this program and help make it easier to enroll.”

In addition to the enrollment delay and penalty suspension, H.R. 3861 also has two other important provisions. First, it would give beneficiaries the option of changing plans once in 2006 if they determine that they've made a poor selection. Second, it would protect those with retiree health benefits who may not be aware that purchasing Medicare drug coverage could cost them their retiree benefits.

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