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U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg: Medicare changes look like Hillarycare to lawmaker

U.S. Rep. Tim Walberg represents Michigan's 7th Congressional District.

Like millions of other senior citizens, my 91-year-old mother has experienced various health struggles over the past few years. As a result, my family has closely followed the rise in prescription drug costs and experienced firsthand the battle many seniors go through to obtain the best health care and prescription drugs available.

From Lansing to Charlotte and all across south-central Michigan, I have listened to seniors express a desire to choose their own individual prescription drug plan. Seniors clearly want greater access to the benefits and drugs they need, and many are extremely wary of giving the federal government the power to dictate their health decisions.

Yet sadly, in the first 100 hours of this Congress, the new leadership in the House enacted troubling changes to the Medicare prescription drug plan, changes that will reduce senior citizens' access to prescription medications.

The new leadership claims billions in savings for taxpayers under its plan, but according to the Congressional Budget Office, taxpayers won't see a dime under the plan.

Our country's largest veterans' service organization, the American Legion, opposes the prescription drug proposal put forth by the Democrats, as does the National Alliance on Mental Illness, Military Order of the Purple Heart, the ALS (Lou Gehrig's disease) Association and the Patient Advocate Foundation.

Under the new government-controlled plan, seniors would be denied access to the one-on-one care of a pharmacist with the ability to advise and counsel seniors about their choice of prescription medicine.

To me, this new plan is reminiscent of Hillary Clinton's health care plan of the 1990s. A one-size-fits-all type of prescription drug plan denies seniors the right to choose a plan meeting their needs and limits their access to many of the newest prescription drugs on the market.

And if we really want to look at how effective the government is at "negotiating" prices, do we need look any further than past examples of egregious government spending, such as the purchase of \$400 hammers or \$600 toilet seats?

The real question facing many seniors is how will the government determine which drugs will be approved. Will these contracts always be given to the "lowest bidder"? Will drug companies that have funneled millions of dollars in campaign contributions be given preferential treatment? And will seniors know whether or not government approved drugs were manufactured in Third World nations?

The current Medicare Part D prescription drug plan saved the average senior citizen nearly \$1,100 on drug costs last year, while providing seniors access to a wide range of cutting-edge, life-saving drugs.

The Medicare prescription drug plan is working, and recent efforts to "fix" the drug plan through a government-run solution will create tremendous problems for our seniors and their families.

While in Congress, I will continue to fight to ensure our seniors have more access at lower costs for their prescription drugs. America needs an effective drug plan for our senior citizens. After all, it's the least we can do to give them what they deserve.

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