



Hon. Doris O. Matsui

Member of Congress

Doris O. Matsui

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MATSUI DISCUSSES COMPLEXITY OF MEDICARE Rx BENEFIT

*Highlights possible legislative fixes during roundtable discussion with leaders of seniors' orgs.
Reinforces need for thoughtful research of options to make the best decision*

Sacramento, CA – During a roundtable discussion, Congresswoman Doris O. Matsui (CA-5) spoke with leaders of seniors' organizations about the confusion surrounding the new Medicare prescription drug benefit, which begins January 1, 2006. As the senior representatives spoke of the problems they and their members have been experiencing with the new benefit, the Congresswoman spoke of some legislative fixes that have already been introduced.

"This Medicare prescription drug benefit is far worse than anticipated. I have heard from many constituents the problems they have had as they try to navigate the plans for themselves – or a loved one – and those problems seem limitless," said Congresswoman Matsui. "Clearly, Congress must take action to begin to address the myriad of problems with the Medicare prescription drug benefit. The status-quo is unforgiving."

While legislative fixes are being sought, Matsui did urge seniors to explore their options, "Despite its shortcomings, the program could result in some savings for seniors. I would strongly encourage thoughtful research of all of the options so beneficiaries have the information necessary to make the best decision. Seniors should take their time, use caution, and learn more."

Congresswoman Matsui supports quick passage of the Medicare Informed Choice Act, H.R. 3861, which would extend the enrollment period beyond the current arbitrary deadline of May 15, 2006, letting seniors have until the end of 2006 to make a decision. Additionally, the legislation would permit beneficiaries to make a one-time change in their plan without penalty during the first year. The Congresswoman is a cosponsor of the bill, which enjoys bipartisan support from 102 Members of the House.

As she explained her support for this proposal, Congresswoman Matsui commented, "Seniors should not feel pressured into making what could ultimately be a bad decision. They should have the ability to correct a mistake when choosing a plan."

The other proposals highlighted to address the shortcomings of the legislation during the discussion would change the law to allow the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) to negotiate lower prescription drug prices and maximize seniors' savings – the Republican prescription drug law explicitly prohibits CMS from doing so. Matsui also supports legislation to protect seniors on a limited income. This legislation would cap the annual increases to the prescription drug premiums that CMS can levy, so that the increase is no greater than 25% of the annual Social Security COLA.

Concluded Matsui, "what has been created is inadequate, overly complex, and fails to maximize the savings for Medicare beneficiaries. Alarming, I think our tax code is less confusing than the new prescription drug benefit – at least for our taxes we have accountants."

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