

HHS Secretary Leavitt visits Sacramento! Meets with Governor, Ignores Seniors Fighting to Access Their Benefits

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January 19, 2006

Thursday, January 19, 2006

Printable Version (PDF) Washington, DC &ndash

gave the following statement in response to Health and Humans Services Secretary Michael O. Leavitt’s limited visit to Sacramento. While Secretary Leavitt will be in Sacramento to talk about the new drug benefit, it will comprise only a visit with Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger, rather than a conversation with the seniors struggling to access their medications. “Yesterday Secretary Leavitt’s office notified me he was planning a town hall meeting in Sacramento, during which seniors would have been able to question him on the Administration’s implementation of the new prescription drug benefit. Unfortunately, the Secretary cancelled on Sacramento seniors for the second time, and yet again missed an opportunity to hear directly from those struggling to understand the Bush Administration’s drug benefit. In opting for a private meeting with the Governor instead, it appears that the Secretary cannot stand the heat of public scrutiny. “With each passing day it only becomes clearer that the Medicare prescription drug benefit, as created, has done nothing to address the stress seniors face when filling their prescription – now they could be forced to walk away from the pharmacy without their prescription. Thankfully the State of California stepped in to provide assistance; I’m still waiting to see what the Administration will do.” Instead of addressing the fundamental underlying issues with the Medicare Modernization Act, the Administration has undertaken a PR effort The Washington Post described as, “President Bush's top health advisers will fan out across the country this week to quell rising discontent with a new Medicare prescription drug benefit.” Congresswoman Matsui has continued to urge the Administration to support legislation that would begin to address the problems with the Medicare prescription Drug Benefit, including sending a letter (pdf) on Wednesday, January 18, 2006, to Secretary Leavitt urging his support of the legislative fixes. When the U.S. House of Representatives returns to session, she will recommended with other Members of Congress to introduce legislation to allow the federal government to reimburse states for the medicines that they are providing seniors unable to access their Medicare Part D benefits. Additionally, Congresswoman Matsui is an original sponsor of the Medicare Informed Choice Act, H.R. 3861 introduced in September 2005, which would delay enrollment penalties in order to give seniors more time to decide which plan may be right for them. ###