

Washington, DC — Early this morning Congressman Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) voted against the Republican Medicare Prescription Drug Legislation considered on the House floor. During a pre-dawn vote kept open for nearly three hours, the Republican leadership manipulated a victory for their legislation to privatize Medicare through strong-arm tactics and backroom deals.

“Our senior citizens need help with spiraling drug costs,” Blumenauer stated. “It is outrageous that moderate income seniors pay the highest prescription drug prices in the world. The idea was to fix this problem, but somewhere along the line, the bill was hijacked by the Republican leadership for other purposes. I can't remember how many of my Republican colleagues have told me that they think this is a bad bill. From the Wall Street Journal to consumer advocates, thoughtful conservatives to people who classify themselves as very liberal, all find this bill deeply flawed.

“Spending what's claimed to be \$400 billion (but will actually entail far more cost to the treasury), and promoted by an unprecedented advertising campaign, this bill was passed to the detriment of America's seniors. The fascinating reversal of position by the leadership of the AARP gave the bill a public relations boost, but that move has already been attacked by its own members.

“The authors of this bill are putting something in for almost everybody -- drug companies, doctors, hospitals, and insurance companies – except senior citizens,” Blumenauer continued. “As over a thousand pages come into focus and the details leaked out are investigated by outside groups, the press, even Members of Congress, it is clear the bill does not meet the needs of our seniors. After all the dust settles, our senior citizens will still pay the highest drug prices in the world out of their own pockets.

“There's something wrong when the only people who appear to be happy with the Medicare Prescription Drug bill are the drug companies. They were able to strip out provisions that would have allowed reimportation of cheaper drugs from Canada. The bill makes it illegal for the government to negotiate lower prices for Medicare recipients. Future price increases will not be indexed to inflation, but to the rate of runaway drug costs, ensuring that spending will continue to spiral out of control.

“For the drug companies, the holidays may come a little early this year. Sadly, deserving senior citizens who need help won't even get this inadequate drug plan until 2006. Told that even in 2006, they will have to pay \$4000 of their first \$5,100 of drug costs, they'll feel that they didn't get a present.”

Blumenauer has heard from many Oregon seniors opposed to the legislation, including Nellie Fox-Edwards, long one of Oregon's leading seniors advocates with the Alliance for Retired Americans.

"This legislation is not the medicine Oregon seniors need," said Fox-Edwards. "The bill will not end the daily dilemma facing seniors in Oregon who have to choose between filling their prescriptions, buying food or heating their homes. Earl is doing the right thing by voting against the bill."