

Newsletter

Summer 2006

Senior Flash Hotline 1-800-998-0180

Dear Friends,

As I write this message to you, the enrollment deadline for the new Part D prescription drug benefit has come and gone. Some members of the House and Senate have introduced legislation to eliminate the late enrollment penalty for 2006 so that millions of seniors and disabled who didn't make the deadline will not be forced to pay a lifetime penalty. But the Part D story is far from over. The next battle to give seniors and the disabled a drug benefit that puts *their* needs ahead of insurers and drug companies has really just begun.

A few days before the May 15th deadline I was honored to join five Senators and twelve members of the House of Representatives at a Capitol Hill rally energized by more than 300 seniors who demanded Congress send Part D back to the drawing board. As I spoke to the crowd, I was proud to report all of the work our NCPSSM members have done to ensure Congress and the President understand that Part D needs a cure. For instance, since the Medicare law passed in 2003, National Committee members and supporters have signed 1.8 million petitions to Congress. During April, you mailed 150,000 letters to the House urging action to fix this flawed drug plan. It's that kind of pressure which forced the Administration to waive the penalties for low-income seniors who missed the enrollment deadline and tighten the process governing how insurance companies change their lists of covered drugs, known as formularies. These are important victories; your voice has made and will continue to make a difference.

Your National Committee Washington staff continues to meet with congressional members to deliver your message about Part D. Our grassroots activists are in the field meeting seniors and organizing volunteers.

With your help, I am hopeful we will convince Congress to fix Part D by: allowing seniors to get prescription drugs directly from Medicare while requiring Medicare to negotiate the lowest prices for seniors, just like the Veterans Administration; eliminating the lifetime penalty for seniors until this confusing plan is overhauled; and ending government subsidies to insurance companies which would free up funds to close the costly coverage gap to seniors, known as the "donut hole."

Thanks to you, Congress is starting to listen. It's your continued support and activism which will ultimately convince Washington that seniors and the disabled deserve a prescription drug plan that puts *their* health ahead of insurer's wealth.

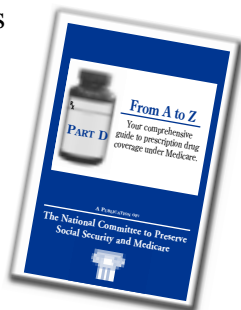


▲ A cheering crowd greeted NCPSSM President Barbara Kennelly during a Capitol Hill Rally to Fix Part D. Members of the National Committee's Rally Corp were on stage and in the audience during the event which also included remarks from members of the Senate, House of Representatives, and other advocacy organizations.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Barbara B. Kennelly". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Grassroots Update

Members of the NCPSSM Rally Corp convened for a day of advocacy training and action at the NCPSSM headquarters in Washington, DC. They learned about recent legislative developments in Congress, lobbying strategies, and how to utilize their local press to influence public opinion on issues of importance to National Committee members. Later in the day, they visited all 535 offices of the members of Congress to deliver the National Committee's booklet "Part D from A to Z." If you live in the DC, MD, or VA areas and would like to find out about becoming a member of the Rally Corp, call 1-800-998-0181.



Member Corner

Do you have a minute to give us your comments and suggestions for future issues of the newsletter? Beginning July 1 through August 31, members of the National Committee are invited to call our toll-free number and leave a recorded message with your opinions. Your comments will be kept confidential and you do not have to give your name or member number. Please call 1-800-966-1935 and ask for the Newsletter comment line. If you're calling after hours or on a weekend, just leave your comments on the main message line.



▲ Josephina Carbonell, Assistant Secretary for Aging (at left) greeted National Committee President Barbara Kennelly (center) and National Committee board member Dr. Carroll Estes (right) during a recent visit to National Committee headquarters for a monthly meeting of the Leadership Council of Aging Organizations (LCAO). The LCAO received an update on the results of the White House Conference on Aging, including proposals for Social Security, Medicare, and the Older Americans Act.

Ask Mary Jane



Q. I will retire next year at age 56 with 12 years of service with the federal government. Is it true that I can receive a supplemental Social Security benefit until I reach age 62 and can start receiving my Social Security retirement benefits?

A. The earliest any Social Security retirement benefit is payable is age 62. Social Security does not offer a pre-retirement-age supplemental benefit.

The Social Security Administration administers a second program called Supplemental Security Income (SSI). Perhaps that is what you had in mind. SSI is not Social Security. It is an assistance program financed by federal general revenue that provides benefits to aged, blind, or disabled individuals who have limited income and assets.

Q. My wife is 73 years of age and draws Social Security benefits on the strength of my employment. She receives approximately 1/2 of my benefit. What, if any, monies will she receive when I die?

A. Should you predecease your wife, the Social Security spouse benefit she now receives will be replaced by a widow benefit equal to the benefit you receive. In effect, a widow who has not earned her own benefit in a greater amount inherits her husband's benefit.

A widow could receive less than her husband's full benefit if she is less than full retirement age when widow benefits begin or if there are other dependents (such as disabled adult children) also receiving benefits on his earnings record.

Q. My mother-in-law is a 77-year-old French citizen. My wife (American citizen) needs to bring her to the USA to take care of her. Would my mother-in-law as a dependent be entitled to any Medicare benefits?

A. Five years after she has been admitted to the United States as a permanent resident, your wife's mother would be eligible to purchase Medicare insurance. She would not be entitled to Medicare as your dependent or your wife's dependent. A dependent parent is eligible for benefits only as a survivor.

The *Wall Street Journal* has recognized the National Committee's *Ask Mary Jane* as "the best source of help for questions about Social Security." Send your questions to NCPSSM Senior Policy Analyst Mary Jane Yarrington at NCPSSM, 10 G Street, NE, Suite 600, Washington, DC 20002-4215, or via email to maryjane@ncpssm.org.

America's "Leaders in Aging" honored at Washington, DC ceremony

The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare is honored to recognize six of the nation's most committed volunteers, caregivers, and programs focused on aging issues and providing services to the elderly. Leaders in Aging Award winners traveled to Washington, DC, on May 22, 2006, to participate in the Salute to Leaders awards program on Capitol Hill.

Following are the 2006 "Leaders in Aging" Award winners:

- Lifetime Achievement Award:
Dr. Carroll Estes; University of San Francisco, CA; Lou Glasse; OWL President Emerita, Poughkeepsie, NY
- Distinguished Senior Award:
Murray Stein; Allen, TX
- Service to Seniors Award-Individual:
Amanda Jones; Evanston Police Department, Evanston, IL
- Service to Seniors Award-Program:
Palliative Care & Bereavement Program; Van Nuys, CA
- Service to Seniors Award-Organization:
Thanks Mom & Dad Fund; Atlanta, GA

There are also 4 distinguished Honorable Mention award winners:

- Service to Seniors Award-Individual:
Ellen Greenberg; Rockville, MD
- Service to Seniors Award-Individual:
Betty Kildahl; Paris, TX
- Service to Seniors Award-Program:
MiCAFE; Lansing, MI
- Service to Seniors Award-Program:
Medicare Prescription Drug Outreach Campaign; Baltimore County Department of Aging, Towson, MD

Each year during Older Americans Month, the National Committee honors individuals, programs, and organizations which have served America's elderly in extraordinary or innovative ways. For more information on the winners and photographs from the ceremony, please visit the National Committee website at www.ncpssm.org.



▲ Members of the NCPSSM Rally Corp participated in a test group for a new website survey tool that has been added to the National Committee website. Do you spend time on the Internet? Have you visited the National Committee's website? Would you like to help us make improvements to the site? Log on to www.ncpssm.org and look for the Web Survey box and fill out our brief survey. We value your opinions!

National Committee reacts to 2006 Social Security and Medicare Trustees Report

The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare has issued its analysis of the 2006 Social Security and Medicare Trustees Report. As expected, the trustees report shows the Medicare Trust Fund will be exhausted in 2018 while the Social Security Trust Fund will be solvent until the year 2040.

This year's trustees report confirms what seniors' advocates already know about the financial health of Social Security and Medicare. This is not a one-size-fits all problem. Both funds face different challenges, different solvency issues, and the debate must focus on a number of solutions as we look to provide long-term solvency.

"The Part D prescription drug program is a perfect example of what happens when privatization is substituted for effective cost containment and price negotiation. Seniors are not getting the lowest prices possible for their prescriptions and premiums are already projected to rise at twice the rate of inflation next year. We can't continue to worship at the altar of privatization while delaying the obvious need to address the larger healthcare cost issues facing our nation."

The National Committee's full analysis of the 2006 trustees report and our viewpoint on the future of Social Security and Medicare: Demographics versus the Cost of Healthcare can be found on our website at www.ncpssm.org.

Fix Part D Rally on Capitol Hill

“National Committee members understand the long-term dangers posed by this flawed law. Just as this administration tried to privatize Social Security last year — they are using Part D to begin the privatization of Medicare, and plan to further undermine the program by shifting more costs onto beneficiaries with Health Savings Accounts and premium support demonstration projects.

In the spirit of Older Americans’ Month, let’s honor our nation’s seniors by giving them what they wanted in the first place — a benefit that serves their interests, that strengthens and does not undermine traditional Medicare — a benefit that negotiates for them, not against them. We want Congress to give seniors the choice they’ll find easy to make — a REAL Medicare prescription drug benefit.”

— excerpt from Barbara Kennelly rally speech



▲ During the Capitol Hill Rally to Fix Part D, National Committee member Mary Gross was onstage (lower left) listening as Senator Dick Durbin (IL) spoke to rally participants about the need to extend the Part D sign-up deadline. Looking on are Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid (NV) and Senator Patty Murray (WA).



▲ During her stirring remarks to the crowd in the Senate Caucus Room, NC President Barbara Kennelly waved a sample of an NC member letter to Congress saying “In the last two weeks, more than 150,000 of our members sent letters to Congress demanding prescription drug coverage that is affordable, universal, voluntary, and available to all seniors under traditional Medicare.”

Call NCPSSM toll free at 1-800-966-1935.

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