

Thank you Bea. I think that Shirbie and Bea's statements have given us a good idea about why the candidate' postions on Medicare Part D are so important to the health of Medicare beneficiaries.

Now I will go over our Part D Candidate Survey and the candidates' responses. U.S. Senator for IL, Dick Durbin and Rep. for the 15th District, Tim Johnson, are up for re-election this fall, so we want to share with you, the voting public, where they and their opponents stand on fixing Medicare Part D as election day rapidly approaches.

We chose to make our survey short and to the point with 5 questions that directly address the issues that we find most important when it comes to fixing Part D. We sent the survey out in mid-July to give the candidates ample time to complete it. Unfortunately, the two Republican candidates, Dr. Steve Sauerberg for the Senate and Rep. Tim Johnson for the House have declined to respond. You have all received 2 reports with your agenda, one for the Senate and one for the House of Representatives, that detail the candidates' answers, so please feel free to refer to them as we go along.

Question 1 reads, "The current Medicare Part D program requires Medicare beneficiaries to enroll in a private insurance company's plan with no option of Part D prescription drug coverage through traditional Medicare. Do you support adding a Medicare-administered Part D prescription drug plan that would provide Part D coverage directly through Medicare?"

The Democratic candidate and Senate incumbent, Dick Durbin said "**YES.** I have introduced legislation to achieve this goal." The legislation that he is talking about is the Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act. The Medicare Task Force supports this legislation and we will be talking more about that when we reach question 5.

As I mentioned, Republican Candidate, Dr. Steve Sauerberg declined to complete the survey so we will mark him as "No Response."

The Green Candidate, Kathy Cummings responded saying, "**YES.** I would vote for such legislation. I would at the same time introduce or co-sponsor a Senate version of HR 676, which would provide full prescription drug coverage for all Americans under one program at a sustainable cost." H.R. 676 would create universal, single-payer health care for everyone in the United States.

The Libertarian candidate, Larry Stafford, responded saying, "**NO.** If the government keeps spending like it has it will go bankrupt and beneficiaries will then receive nothing!"

As for the candidates for our district's Congressional Representative, unfortunately, the Republican incumbent, Rep. Tim Johnson declined to respond to our survey. However, his opponent, Democratic candidate, Steve Cox responded to question 1 saying "**YES.** Until [universal health coverage] is established, seniors should be able to have the option of a Medicare-administered Part D prescription drug plan."

Now for question 2. It reads, "The current Medicare Part D legislation does not permit Medicare to negotiate discounted prescription drug prices. Do you support authorizing Medicare to negotiate discounted prescription drug prices, much like the Veteran's Administration has successfully done for years?"

Senator Dick Durbin responded saying, "**YES.** I have introduced legislation to achieve this goal." He is again referring to the Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act."

We will mark Dr. Sauerberg as "No Response" again.

Kathy Cummings responded saying "**YES.** I would introduce or co-sponsor such legislation."

Larry Stafford said, "**YES.** I would support allowing private plans to negotiate and to import foreign drugs to lower prices." Candidate Stafford did not exactly respond to the question that we asked. We asked if he supported Medicare being able to use the bulk buying power of all Medicare

beneficiaries to negotiate for lower drug prices, however, he is focusing on the ability of private plans to negotiate individually.

We will mark Rep. Johnson as "No Response." However, Steve Cox agrees with negotiating for lower drug prices as well. He said, "**YES.** [I would] pass legislation that allows Medicare that function. There is absolutely no reason for this not to be allowed."

Question 3 reads, "The current Medicare Part D basic program includes a significant coverage gap commonly referred to as the "Donut Hole." During this coverage gap, Medicare beneficiaries have to pay a monthly insurance premium for their Part D prescription drug coverage, while receiving no actual coverage and having to pay 100% of their prescription drug costs. Do you support the elimination of the "Donut Hole" coverage gap?"

Sen. Dick Durbin responded saying "**YES.** I support the development of legislation to close this coverage gap so that Medicare beneficiaries will have drug coverage they can depend on. One possible source of savings to help pay for this change is the reduced costs that should be achieved through drug price negotiation as discussed in question 2."

Dr. Sauerberg is another "No Response."

Kathy Cummings said, " **YES.** I would vote for legislation that would eliminate the Donut Hole coverage gap while otherwise leaving the current system in place."

Larry Stafford said, "**YES.** I would support legislation that requires coverage anytime premiums are being paid." Of the candidates who responded, all agreed that the Donut Hole should be eliminated.

Of course Rep. Johnson is another "No Response." However his opponent, Steve Cox responded saying, "**YES.** Legislation should be passed to make Medicare Part D basic program an easier transition. The "Donut Hole" should not exist. "

Question 4 asks the candidates, "The current Medicare Part D program does not require private insurance Part D plans to follow a standardized appeals process that guarantees access to all medically necessary prescription medication. Do you support modifying the Part D program to create and require all private insurance Part D plans to follow a uniform, clear, and timely appeals process that guarantees access to all medically necessary prescription medications for beneficiaries under every Part D plan?"

Sen. Durbin said, "**YES.** To be effective, the appeals process must be easy for beneficiaries to access and must ensure that beneficiaries receive medically necessary prescription drugs."

Dr. Sauerberg had "No Response."

Kathy Cummings said, "**YES.** I would vote for such legislation. However, I would expect the insurance companies to continue to find ways to avoid coverage."

Larry Stafford differed from his opponents by saying, "**NO.** I do support requiring private plans to clearly spell out in writing what their process is for appealing their decisions...and telling their customers up front if they will be covered during the appeals process or not. Once the Medicare consumer knows this information, then they can decide if they need to choose a different provider or not."

Rep. Tim Johnson again had no response.

Democratic candidate for the House, Steve Cox, said, "**YES.** [I would] pass legislation to make that change."

Question 5 talks about the legislation that Sen. Durbin mentioned earlier. The Medicare Task Force greatly supports the Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act because, if passed, it would accomplish nearly all of the goals of our Campaign to Fix Part D.

The survey reads, "The Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act (H.B. 3932, S.2219.IS) would create a Medicare-administered drug plan as

an additional option to the existing private Part D plans. This legislation would also allow the Medicare-administered plan to negotiate for lower drug prices. If elected, would you support this legislation?"

Sen Durbin responded saying "**YES.** I am the lead sponsor of this legislation in the Senate and have worked closely with Congresswoman Schakowsky (from the Chicago area), who is lead sponsor of the House bill. I expect to re-introduce the bill next year."

Dr. Sauerberg had "No Response" again.

Kathy Cummings responded saying, "**YES.** I would introduce or co-sponsor such legislation. I would at the same time, introduce or co-sponsor a Senate version of HR 676, under which decisions about prescription drugs would be made by physicians and patients, eliminating the costly Part bureaucracy." This is the single-payer legislation that Ms. Cummings mentioned in question 1.

Larry Stafford again took a different position than Senator Durbin and Kathy Cummings saying "**NO.** For the same reasons listed in question 1."

Rep. Johnson has not commented on this legislation when we've talked to him about it in the past and unfortunately, since he did not complete the survey, we still do not know where he stands on this issue.

Steve Cox, however, said, "**YES.** I would co-sponsor that legislation."

So that is the end of the survey. As we saw, Sen. Durbin and Kathy Cummings agree on a number of issues. Sen. Durbin's responses indicate that he continues to be a strong proponent of the Medicare Prescription Drug Savings and Choice Act that he has sponsored, which includes many of the components reflected in our survey questions. Larry Stafford supports maintaining the current private-run Part D program, but with the ability for insurance companies to negotiate for lower drug prices and the elimination of the Donut Hole.

Candidate for Representative of District 15, Steve Cox, also responded to the survey with support for all of the changes proposed by the Medicare Task Force.

The Medicare Task Force is extremely disappointed that Republican candidates, Dr. Steve Sauerberg and Rep. Tim Johnson did not take the time to complete our Part D Candidate Survey, even after repeated special efforts to work with them and repeated promises from their staff that they would do so. As I said earlier, we sent out this survey in mid-July so that should have been ample time for them to complete the 5 questions. I don't know, perhaps they are still working on it. Their lack of response seems to show either an unwillingness to commit to a position, or an unwillingness to disclose their real position on the issue. Either way, their failure to respond is a disservice to the voters of our community.

Fixing Medicare Part D is one of the biggest issues facing Medicare beneficiaries right now, and we hope that our elected officials recognize how this issue affects the lives of millions of seniors and people with disabilities across our nation. Only Congress can make the changes to Part D that Medicare beneficiaries so desperately need. So, we encourage you to keep the health of Medicare beneficiaries in mind when you go to the polls on November 4th. We hope that for voters who care strongly about Part D this survey has provided useful information to help you cast your ballot for Senator and Representative of District 15. Now please go out and vote! Thank you very much.