

Katie Coombes' Comments
Empty Pill Bottle Delivery
5-18-2006

Outside Johnson's Office:

Welcome and thank you all for coming today. We are here because Congress and the Bush administration let us down. The Medicare Part D enrollment deadline this past Monday, May 15, should have been extended. An incredible convergence of evidence -- national reports, Medicare beneficiaries' lived experience, and the expert opinions of Medicare caseworkers -- all supported the necessity of extending the enrollment deadline.

The Medicare Task Force saw fundamental flaws in the Part D program and began working for improvements in December of 2005 with a petition campaign supporting legislation that would extend the Part D enrollment deadline for all of 2006 and legislation supporting the creation of a Medicare administered prescription drug benefit.

The Medicare Task Force met with Representative Johnson on March 20, 2006 and delivered the petitions with hundreds of signatures in support of HR 3861/SB1841, The Medicare Informed Choice Act of 2005. After being presented with the petitions, Rep. Johnson stated that he would support extending the enrollment deadline. The task force naturally concluded that Rep. Johnson's pledge to support extending the enrollment deadline was related to the legislation the Task Force members had just presented.

Surprisingly, this was not the case. When the deadline came, Rep. Johnson's support of extending the enrollment deadline never materialized. He did not sign the discharge petition that would have ensured the legislation to extend the enrollment deadline would come up for a vote in the House. Instead Rep. Johnson's staff is quoted in the News Gazette on May 10 saying, "Johnson was willing to support extending the enrollment deadline for a month or so."

Well, naturally, we are confused. There is no legislation that would extend the deadline for, "a month or so," and Johnson didn't make any efforts to introduce legislation or do anything else to fix Part D for Medicare beneficiaries.

However, the Medicare Task Force remains hopeful that Rep. Johnson will take concrete action to improve Medicare Part D. It is our understanding that bi-partisan legislation will be introduced to retroactively extend the Part D enrollment deadline, and we would like to discuss this upcoming opportunity.

When we go inside Rep. Johnson's office, we'll be delivering a letter from the Medicare Task Force requesting another meeting so that we can understand what Rep. Johnson is doing to serve Medicare beneficiaries in the 15th district.

We will also deliver empty pill bottles to represent all the Medicare beneficiaries who will not be able to fill their prescriptions due to the Part D program being too expensive, too confusing, and now arbitrarily closed.

I ask that those of you who brought empty pill bottles to turn them in now. We'll go inside once we have all the empty bottles.