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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 12, 2003

LARSON STATEMENT ON PRESIDENT BUSH'S SPEECH IN CONNECTICUT TODAY

WASHINGTON, D.C.-U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) today issued the following statement in response to the speech President Bush gave today in New Britain on the GOP Medicare prescription drug plan.

"Democrats in Congress have been fighting for years for a real prescription drug benefit under Medicare that offers affordable and meaningful coverage for all seniors. As Congress moves forward in trying to address this issue, I believe that Democrats in both houses are open to working with the President and our colleagues to pass legislation that will truly meet the needs of seniors, who are desperately in need of prescription drug relief. Unfortunately, the GOP plan in its current form is totally inadequate and falls far short of ensuring that seniors receive the relief they need.

"The Republican bill would place prescription drug relief in the hands of HMOs, who would design the plan and even determine what drugs are covered. These HMOs would have to promise to stay in the program for only a year, meaning that seniors could be forced to change doctors, plans and even medications every 12 months. We here in Connecticut, especially in our more rural counties, have already seen HMOs pull out of Medicare Plus-Choice, which offered prescription drug coverage for seniors.

"The GOP bill is also inadequate in that it would force seniors to spend \$250 before they are able to get relief and would then pay a portion of their first \$2,000 in drug costs. It would then offer no help at all until out-of-pocket drug expenditures reach \$3,700, creating a gap in coverage for almost half of all seniors. This is unacceptable.

"The GOP leadership is perfectly willing to provide massive tax cuts that benefit our nation's wealthiest, but are apparently unwilling to enact real prescription drug coverage for the people who need it. Congress and the President must work together in a bipartisan manner to pass legislation that will guarantee comprehensive, affordable prescription drug coverage for seniors under Medicare, a successful program that seniors know and should trust," said Larson.

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