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LARSON VOTES TO CREATE A PRESCRIPTION DRUG PLAN SAFETY NET AND REJECT THE PRIVATIZATION OF MEDICARE

WASHINGTON, D.C.- In a procedural vote Monday night, U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) voted to reject a provision in the Republican prescription drug proposal, H.R. 1, known as "premium support" that will turn Medicare into a voucher program, rather than a defined benefit program by 2010. This change would cause premiums to rise substantially for those wanting to remain in a traditional Medicare program at that time. The Chief Actuary of Medicare estimates that premiums could rise by up to 25 percent under the "premium support" provision.

Larson also voted to accept provisions passed in the Senate requiring a federal "fallback" prescription drug benefit if at least two private plans fail to enter the market in a region, should the GOP prescription drug plan be enacted. Under the Senate provision, the federal government would offer beneficiaries a Medicare prescription drug benefit if this occurs.

"The AARP has pointed out that the premium support provisions to be implemented in 2010 could destabilize Medicare and force beneficiaries of the program to pay much higher costs," said Larson. "This is dramatically limiting the choices seniors would have and dismantling a program they know and trust.

"The Senate amendment would create a safety net for seniors to address the serious problems created by the GOP seeking to place prescription drug coverage in the hands of HMOs. When it comes to private plans, we in Connecticut remember HMOs pulling out of Medicare Plus Choice prescription drug plans because they simply were not profitable enough. This is why a real prescription drug benefit should be under Medicare, ensuring that seniors have the coverage they need and deserve, instead of being forced to rely on HMOs."

The House and Senate passed two different prescription drug bills and a conference committee must be formed with members of both bodies to reconcile the two bills before Congress votes on a final piece of legislation. The vote Monday was a "motion to instruct conferees" put forward by the Democrats, intended to direct members of the conference committee as to what actions they should take in crafting a final bill. The motion was defeated by a vote of 191 - 221.

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