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Citizens Tell Congress and Presidential Candidates To Stop the Stinky Plan to Privatize Medicare

Des Moines) Joined by Stinky the Skunk, citizen and labor leaders stood on the steps of the State Capital in Des Moines today to call on the Iowa Congressional delegation and presidential candidates to oppose a Medicare prescription drug bill that is steamrolling through Congress.

“We are here today to tell our members of Congress that this deal stinks so badly we can smell it all the way from Washington to Des Moines,” said Deb Stehr, vice president of the Iowa Citizen Action Network. Stehr, dressed as a skunk added, “The deal stinks from the cheap benefits, it stinks by throwing seniors and persons with disabilities at the mercy of HMOs and drug companies, and it stinks by threatening the employer sponsored drug benefits of retirees.”

Senate action is expected this Thursday on legislation sponsored by Senators Chuck Grassley and Max Baucus (D-Montana) that would add prescription drug coverage to Medicare and allow new private insurance plans to offer Medicare coverage. The legislation was introduced on June 12th. A similar plan is expected to be voted on in the House also this week. Both plans would radically change the current Medicare program.

“There are three big reasons why this drug plan stinks,” according to David Campbell, Alliance for Retired Americans. “It privatizes Medicare by putting seniors at the mercy of private HMOs and insurance companies for coverage and costs. It will destroy Medicare by luring seniors and people with disabilities into HMOs and PPOs. It costs too much—much more than Congress pays, while doing nothing to control the costs of prescription drugs.”

“The Medicare drug plan is bad because of the way it calculates consumer out-of-pocket costs.” said Ken Sagar, secretary-treasurer, Iowa Federation of Labor. “This plan could prompt employers to drop coverage for 4.4 million retirees who now use it to fill the gaps in Medicare.

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“ We need Senator Harkin and the Senators running for president to help stop this Medicare steamroller before it rolls over Iowa’s seniors and people with disabilities who rely on Medicare,” said Lisa Davis-Cook, Co-director of Iowa Citizen Action Network. “President Bush wants Congress to act fast, before Americans get a chance to see that this bill is a hoax being played on the nation’s seniors who are struggling to afford prescription drugs.”

The group is calling on Iowa’s Congressional delegation to come home during the 4th of July recess and meet with seniors, people with disabilities, their family members and tax payers to explain what the Medicare plan really means for them.

Stinky the skunk, will stop by Senator Harkin’s office to thank him for opposing the Grassley-Baucus plan and for his votes to improve it. She will also visit the campaign offices of the democratic presidential candidates located in Des Moines. Pill bottles disguised as skunks will be delivered along with a letter urging candidates to oppose the stinky plan to privatize Medicare.

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A new report from the Consumers Union *Skimpy Benefits and Unchecked Expenditures: Medicare Prescription Drug Bills Fail to Offer Adequate Protection for Seniors and People with Disabilities* is available on the web www.consumersunion.org/pdf/medicare-603.PDF