



For Immediate Release

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**Tampa Bay Activists & Seniors Blow Whistle on
Congress' Prescription Drug Bill;
Call on Bilirakis to Work for Medicare Coverage That
Benefits Seniors and People with Disabilities,
Instead of Pharmaceutical & Insurance Companies**

Palm Harbor, FL --- Tampa Bay area health care activists, seniors and people with disabilities demonstrated today outside the Palm Harbor office of Rep. Mike Bilirakis. Staff and members of Florida Consumer Action Network (FCAN), Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (ACORN), and UNITE joined with participants from the AARP town hall meeting held earlier that morning in expressing their frustration that Rep. Bilirakis passed on the opportunity to meet with constituents. "He wouldn't come hear us, so we've come here to his office", said Philip Compton of Florida Consumer Action Network. "It's too bad he has more important things to do than to listen to the voters when he has such an important job to do in the next few weeks." Bilirakis is the only member of Congress from Florida selected for the joint House-Senate conference committee that will resolve the differences in the two bills intended to provide coverage for prescription drugs to the 32.5 million Americans now covered by Medicare.

FCAN also today released a new report, "[The Impact of Medicare Reforms on Floridians](#)". The report points out the 6 major problems with the Senate and House
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bills that were passed in July. “This report clearly shows that Congress’ prescription drug plan is a bad deal for Americans. It’s not a matter of some new amount of limited coverage being better than nothing; these bills do far more harm than good,” said FCAN Executive Director Bill Newton.

Newton explained how Congress’ plans would actually cost almost a million Floridians more for prescriptions than they now pay, place 300,000 Floridians at risk of losing insurance coverage they now have for prescriptions; raise Medicare Part B deductibles for 2 and half million Floridians, and add Medicare costs for the 1st time to home health care and laboratory services.

“Floridians are increasingly alarmed at the many ways they’ll pay more in return for the extremely skimpy coverage this bill provides,” stated Newton. “Congress cut a sweet deal for its friends in the pharmaceutical & insurance industries. Instead of using Medicare to purchase drugs at bulk discounts nationwide like Wal-Mart or the VA does, they chose to provide coverage through hundreds of HMO’s and insurance companies who’ll pay high retail prices for drugs. Insurance companies get to collect new premiums, and pharmaceutical companies get to charge their asking price. And every American taxpayer foots the bill, while Medicare beneficiaries get a lousy deal. We call on Rep. Bilirakis to go to the conference committee and rework this mess into a plan that puts the needs of Americans 1st, not his friends in the pharmaceutical & insurance industries.”

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Florida Consumer Action Network (FCAN) is a statewide non-profit citizen organization with 40,000 members from Key West to Tallahassee. FCAN advocates solutions to Florida’s health care, environmental and consumer issues, and is an affiliate of USAction, a progressive grassroots organization dedicated to winning social justice.