



# Congresswoman LYNN WOOLSEY Reports to the 6th District Summer 2003



Congress of the United States  
House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Friends:

On July 30, 1965, Medicare became the law of the land. As President Lyndon Johnson signed this historic legislation, he said: "No longer will older Americans be denied the healing miracle of modern medicine. No longer will illness crush and destroy the savings that they have so carefully put away over a lifetime... And no longer will this Nation refuse the hand of justice to those who have given a lifetime of service and wisdom and labor to the progress of this... country."

Exactly 38 years later, Medicare's promise is about to be broken. Late last month, Congress passed legislation that would put Medicare on a path to privatization, destroying one of the most popular and successful government programs in American history.

Ironically and tragically, the Medicare debate was supposed to be about *enhancing* the program, by adding a benefit that would help Medicare patients afford the prescription drugs that are extending and enriching their lives. And we know just how expensive those medications can be. I have requested a study that will demonstrate the cost of prescription drugs in Marin and Sonoma Counties, relative to other industrialized nations. That study will be completed soon. Please check my website (<http://woolsey.house.gov>) in the coming weeks.

The Medicare bill passed by the House essentially uses prescription drug coverage to entice seniors out of Medicare and into HMOs and other private insurance plans that could be expensive and unreliable. Here in Marin and Sonoma counties, we know just how treacherous it can be to depend on HMO coverage. When the Health Plan of the Redwoods went bankrupt, it left 78,000 of our neighbors without coverage and care.

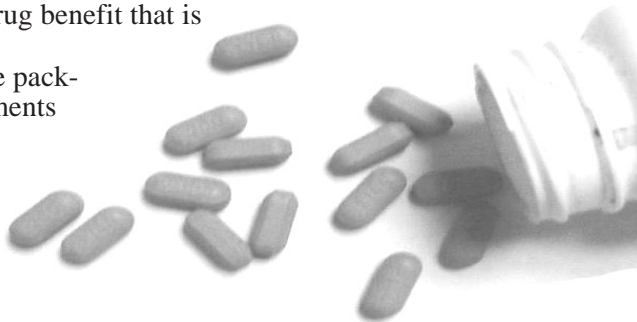
The House bill also has a huge gap that leaves seniors without coverage just when they need it most. Even after having paid their deductible and while still paying a monthly premium, seniors would receive no help at all once their annual prescription drug bills reach \$2,000 and until they reach the catastrophic level of \$4,900. Nearly half of all seniors would fall into this "doughnut hole."

The House bill also includes provisions that have nothing to do with a prescription drug benefit, but which are designed simply to undermine Medicare. For example, their plan increases the amount seniors pay for simple doctors' visits.

The Medicare bills passed by the Congress last month are bitter pills indeed. HMOs and pharmaceutical companies will reap the benefits; at the expense of American retirees. With the retirement of the first baby boomers just seven years away, now is not the time to dismantle Medicare and turn it into a voucher program. Instead, we ought to be building the firm foundation that Medicare needs for the future, by modernizing and expanding the program to include an affordable prescription drug benefit that is available to all seniors.

I will be working to try to fill the holes in this flawed Medicare package. But, as always, I will need your help. Please offer your comments and input to me on this vitally important issue.

Sincerely,



## it's your federal government

### Meet & Speak

Call (707) 542-7182 to schedule an individual appointment or just drop in to meet with Rep. Woolsey and discuss issues that are important to you.

**Sept. 13, 9AM - 12PM**  
Pickleweed Community Center  
50 Canal St., San Rafael

**Oct. 25, 9AM - 12PM**  
Luther Burbank Center  
50 Mark West Springs Rd.,  
Santa Rosa

**Nov. 15, 9AM - 12PM**  
Head Start Center  
5520 Nave Dr., Novato

### Timely Links

The official U.S. Government site for people with Medicare:  
[www.medicare.gov](http://www.medicare.gov)

Your guide through the Medicare Maze:  
[www.medicarerights.org](http://www.medicarerights.org)

A free, public service website for California Medicare beneficiaries, their families and friends:  
[www.calmedicare.org](http://www.calmedicare.org)

A webform to receive periodic e-mail updates about California's Sixth Congressional District and Issues that affect you:  
[woolsey.house.gov/signup.asp](http://woolsey.house.gov/signup.asp)

### Office Locations

#### Marin County Office

1050 Northgate Drive Suite 140  
San Rafael, Ca. 94903  
(415) 507-9554

#### Sonoma County Office

1101 College Avenue Suite 200  
Santa Rosa, Ca 95404  
(707) 542-7182

#### Washington, D.C. Office

2263 Rayburn H.O.B.  
Washington, D.C. 20515  
(202) 225-5161

<http://woolsey.house.gov>

## A Sound Medicare Rx Alternative

There was a Democratic alternative to the package that passed the House. I supported this simple plan that gave all seniors the same prescription drug benefit package through Medicare.

It had no coverage gap, a low annual deductible of \$100 and a reasonable \$25 monthly premium. And it would have addressed the cost issue by allowing the government to use the collective bargaining clout of 40 million Medicare

beneficiaries to negotiate lower drug prices.

The House bill will have to be reconciled with a Senate version, which is less extreme but which still leaves our seniors at the mercy of the marketplace.

For up to date information, please visit my website. Click on <http://woolsey.house.gov> and, under "Hot Topics," choose the Medicare Drug Corner.

## The Stale and Moldy Half

Some of my colleagues supported the Medicare bills under the theory that half a loaf is better than none at all. But what if that half-loaf is stale and moldy? I do not believe we should pass bad legislation just so we can say we passed legislation.

Others are saying that this bill is all we could afford right now. I say affordability is just a matter of priorities. Earlier last month, the House Republicans led the drive to give \$820 billion over 10 years to a few thousand heirs through the permanent repeal of the estate tax. For virtually the same amount of money, we could have invested in the health security of more than 40 million Americans by providing a real Medicare prescription drug benefit.

Any bill that emerges from this Congress will almost surely be a mediocre one that does not strengthen Medicare and does not address the prescription drug issue. Its supporters will boast that they gave Americans a prescription drug benefit. But they won't tell you what's in the fine print. They won't tell you about the coverage gap and the higher premiums.



Rep. Woolsey informs constituents about efforts to protect Medicare at a town hall meeting in Santa Rosa.

## The Impact on Women

I am especially concerned about the impact that the new Medicare "reform" will have on older women. I recently turned 65, but I am lucky to still be healthy enough to work at a job that I love that provides comprehensive prescription drug coverage. Too many women my age don't have it so easy.

Most women live on fixed incomes of less than \$10,000 a year. They live longer and are more reliant on prescription drugs than men. But because they have earned less over the course of their lifetimes, they have smaller pensions and smaller Social Security

checks. Even women who work outside the home get squeezed, since two-thirds of them are employed in sectors, like service and retail, which offer less generous pensions.

More often than not, it is women who have shouldered the burden of caring for small children, elderly parents and other family members. So what thanks do women get after a lifetime of unpaid service to others? Just when they need a little help of their own, Congress pulls the rug out from under them by weakening the very program, Medicare, which was designed to see them through their golden years.

### Did you know?

"The average price in Sonoma County for the five most popular drugs for seniors is 88% higher than the average price of the drugs in Canada, Europe and Japan."

U.S. House of Representatives, Comm. on Government Reform, Minority Staff  
July 2003

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*Lynn Woolsey*  
M.C.

Official Business  
OR CURRENT RESIDENT

ECRWSS  
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inside... Congressional news on protecting Medicare for America's seniors.