

have discovered through many meetings with seniors around the country that they remain confused and skeptical about the new discount card program. This is unfortunate, because there are some seniors—particularly those who qualify for the low-income benefit—who will clearly benefit from the new discount cards. In our written materials and many meetings, we have urged seniors everywhere to research the cards and determine whether they will benefit from them. We welcome hearings such as this, because we believe they can provide critical information to millions of seniors struggling to understand the new benefit.

Unfortunately, we believe most of the problems with the new cards are inherent in the design of the program and cannot be corrected by the end of 2005. More importantly, we believe the discount cards are a metaphor for the entire new Medicare law. Unless the law is rewritten, the same fundamental flaws that have made the discount cards so frustrating to seniors today will make the new drug benefit equally disappointing when it becomes effective in 2006, and could undermine public support for the entire Medicare program.

The National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare spent the last six years advocating for a comprehensive, affordable prescription drug benefit offered through the Medicare program, because that is what our seniors have been telling us they need and we believe they deserve. If Congress had worked directly through Medicare rather than a system of private providers to provide both the temporary discount card and the permanent drug benefit, it could have taken advantage of the universal, consistent, inexpensive delivery system that is already inherent in the Medicare program. The result would have been a simple, meaningful benefit to seniors.

Unfortunately, that is not what has been implemented through P.L. 108-173. We understand that the wide variety of discount card providers was intended as a service to seniors, to give them the broadest array of card choices. But instead of providing a benefit to seniors, the multitude of options has proved to be extremely confusing, particularly with so few seniors comfortable using the Internet. Allowing sponsors of the cards to change both the drugs covered and the discounts on the drugs weekly was intended to encourage competition between providers, further lowering prices. But experience to date has shown the listed prices can go up as well as down, and even those seniors who research the cards carefully cannot be certain they will end up with the best deal. Meanwhile, because seniors are only allowed to have one Medicare-approved card at a time, and they are locked into their chosen card until the end of the year, they worry about being forced to stay with a plan that ultimately does not provide them with significant benefits. This worry can result in paralysis, with seniors preferring not to purchase a card at all rather than risk buying one that does not serve their needs.

This problem will be exacerbated when the permanent benefit begins. We do not know today how many companies will opt to provide the permanent prescription drug benefit in 2006, so it is not clear whether seniors will be faced with a choice between as many providers. Even if the number of options is smaller, however, their choices will be even more complicated than with the discount card. Not only will they be confronted with a confusing array of multiple providers covering different drugs at a variety of prices, in some cases they will also be faced with choosing between managed care companies with completely different menus of standard health services as well.

If they choose wrong in the case of the discount card, their only loss is the price of the card and whatever discounts they might have received with a different card. But if they pick a health care provider that does not serve their needs once the permanent benefit begins, the financial consequences could be catastrophic. And unlike the discount card, where taking time to make the right choice does not have adverse consequences, seniors delaying enrollment in the permanent benefit could pay increased premiums for the rest of their lives.

But the most significant problem with the new Medicare law, Mr. Chairman, is the lack of cost containment. As you know, most seniors are on relatively fixed incomes, dependent upon Social Security for a significant portion of their income in retirement. They are extremely sensitive to price increases because they rarely have a cushion of disposable income to protect them from the ravages of inflation. They are well aware of the skyrocketing increases in prescription drug costs that have been confirmed in two recent studies. Families USA found prices of the 30 most popular drugs used by seniors increased at four times the rate of general inflation during 2003, and AARP found a 28% increase in a broader list of drugs from 2000 to 2003. Small wonder that seniors are less than impressed by a discount card program that offers reductions of 10 to 25 percent.

CMS has said it intends to monitor the cards to make sure senior discounts are not based on artificially inflated prices, but without a clear definition of what is an acceptable price increase, and considering the issues of artificially inflated prices represented by Average Wholesale Prices, protecting seniors will not be easy. And we are not aware of any federal agency investigating the significant increases prescription drug prices have experienced in recent years, to determine whether those increases were warranted in the first place.

If the new prescription drug benefit is offered through Medicare, the purchasing power of its 41 million seniors can be harnessed to negotiate for the lowest possible prices, with all the savings passed along directly to seniors. But without effective cost containment, the new prescription drug benefit could well turn out to be an illusion for many seniors, offering limited federal assistance in paying for drugs whose cost keeps skyrocketing unchecked, much as the discount card program appears to many seniors today. And unfortunately, the drug benefit that looks meager today will only become worse with time. According to Medicare's own Trustees, within a few short years seniors will need to have over \$8,580 in covered drug costs to trigger the catastrophic coverage. At that point, seniors will be paying over \$6,000 in out-of-pocket costs, in addition to an estimated \$730 in annual premiums, and only \$2,500 will be picked-up by Medicare.

Many in Congress, including you, Mr. Chairman, have acknowledged the lack of cost containment in the new prescription drug program by advocating for reimportation of drugs from Canada and other countries. While the National Committee supports reimportation, we believe any relief it offers will be temporary.

Mr. Chairman, we believe the problems evident in the discount card program have provided Congress with a unique opportunity to correct the flaws in the new Medicare bill before it goes into effect. We urge you to revisit the program while there is still time to make the fundamental changes that will be needed to provide seniors with the kind of access to affordable drugs that they truly require. We look forward to working with you toward this goal as the process continues.

HARRY BELAFONTE RECEIVING
THE GLOBAL EXCHANGE HUMAN
RIGHTS AWARD

HON. BARBARA LEE

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 14, 2004

Ms. LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Mr. Belafonte both a friend and mentor as he receives the Global Exchange Human Rights Award. I share his passion for civil rights, social justice, peace, lifting the embargo on Cuba, and eradicating poverty both abroad and at home.

Recently, I introduced legislation to create a national Caribbean-American Heritage Month, and Mr. Belafonte was a primary influence in developing this legislation. Born in New York, but raised in Jamaica, Mr. Belafonte served our country and beyond in many ways; throughout his career, Mr. Belafonte has worked to unite the international community for just causes.

When people think of Mr. Belafonte, they may remember him for his album *Calyпсо* being the first to sell over 1 million copies with his hit *The Banana Boat*, or they may reminisce of his scenes as the co-star in the historic adaptation of Bizet's opera, "*Carmen*" titled "*Carmen Jones*."

Many will recall Mr. Belafonte marching alongside Dr. Martin Luther King and leaders of the Civil Rights Movement. Dr. King was later to say, "Belafonte's global popularity and his commitment to our cause is a key ingredient to the global struggle for freedom and a powerful tactical weapon in the Civil Rights movement here in America."

Belafonte was named to the Board of Directors of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference (SCLC), and at Dr. King's death, he became one of three executors of the great leader's estate. I commend him for his tireless efforts in championing the rights of people here in the United States and beyond.

Showing that his talents were not limited to making history in just music and politics, Mr. Belafonte became the first African-American producer in television. His company went on to produce one Emmy-nominated success after another for the three major networks—"The Strollin' Twenties," written by the famed author Langston Hughes, starring such great performers as Sidney Poitier, Diahann Carroll, Sammy Davis, Jr. and Duke Ellington and "A Time for Laughter," featuring Richard Pryor, Redd Foxx, Moms Mabley and Pigmeat Markham. The format of this special set became the model for the TV comedy series, "Laugh-In."

In 1960 he was named by President John F. Kennedy as cultural advisor to the Peace Corps; this position inspired Mr. Belafonte's development of our similar passion for the people of the African continent. Twenty-five years later, Mr. Belafonte won an Emmy for the all-star *We Are the World* video, calling global attention to war and famine crises throughout Africa.

Two years later, he was appointed as UNICEF Goodwill Ambassador, only the second American to hold that title. In this capacity, Mr. Belafonte created an historic symposium in Dakar, Senegal for the immunization of African children. The positive response to this symposium led to a successful campaign

for the eradication of curable diseases among African children. This work was continued in a convention called "Children of the Front Line" in Harare, Zimbabwe. As part of this effort, with the largest concentration of African artists ever assembled, Mr. Belafonte performed a concert benefiting UNICEF.

Mr. Speaker, there is much more that I would like to share about this living legend who has left a mark on our world. Clearly, Mr. Belafonte is laudable recipient of this award, which highlights his contributions toward securing human rights and freedoms locally and throughout the world. Most importantly, I am proud and honored to call "Harry" my friend.

I thank you for giving me the opportunity to honor Mr. Belafonte, a World War II veteran, musician, visionary, activist, and my brother, in the struggle for social justice and peace.

PAYING TRIBUTE TO "RAY
CHARLES—A NATIONAL TREASURE"

HON. DANNY K. DAVIS

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, June 14, 2004

Mr. DAVIS of Illinois. Mr. Speaker, tonight I pay tribute to the angel of soul in music Mr. Ray Charles the piano man with the soulful voice who reshaped American music for a half century. He brought the essence of soul to country, jazz, rock, and every other style of music that you can think of he had an influence on it.

Mr. Charles died at the age of 73 of an acute liver disease at his Beverly Hills home at 11:35 a.m. on Thursday, June 10, 2004 surrounded by family and friends. As a singer, pianist and composer, Charles broke racial and musical barriers as an African American, blind by the age of 7 and an orphan at 15, he spent the rest of his life blending rhythm and blues into various musical art forms that earned him 12 Grammy Awards and immense fame for five decades.

Ray Charles "The Genius" produced many hit songs like "What'd I Say?" which featured the Raelettes, was his first million selling song. Next came a classic version of Hoagy Carmichael's 1930 song "Georgia on My Mind." Charles version became the official state song of Georgia. Due to some objections by recording executives at the label company, Charles made "Modern Sounds in Country and Western music" in 1962, an album that produced a million-seller with songs like "I Can't Stop Loving You" and the popular hit "Hit the Road, Jack" and "Let the Good Times Roll." At the 1960 Grammy Awards, he took home four awards across all genres, including best vocal performance by a pop artist ("Georgia on My Mind"), best vocal performance album ("The Genius of Ray Charles") and best R&B performance ("Let the Good Times Roll").

He later won Grammy Awards for "Busted" in 1963 and "Crying Time" in 1966 and other songs like "Let's Go Get Stoned." In all, Mr. Charles made more than 60 albums and his influence has resonated through generations of country, pop, R&B and gospel singers.

Mr. Charles began involving himself in music at a very early age. In his autobiography, Charles said, "as long as I can remem-

ber, music has always been something extraordinary in my life. It's always been something that completely captured my attention—from the time I was three, when Mr. Pitman was showing me these little melodies. My first love was the music I heard in the community: blues, church gospel music, and country and western. My mom would let me stay up to listen to the Grand Old Opry on Saturday night. That's the only time I got to stay up late. I heard the blues played by Muddy Waters and Blind Boy Philips and Tampa Red and Big Boy Crudup. And of course every night if you listened to the right station, you might pick up a little Duke Ellington or Count Basie. But the bulk of what I heard of blues in those days was called "race music," which became rhythm and blues, and rhythm and blues later was called soul music."

Mr. Charles learned to read and write music in Braille, scored for big bands and played instruments like the trumpet, clarinet, organ, alto sax and the piano. This experience in reading Braille and playing by ear helped Charles develop a superb memory where he could sit at his desk and write a complete arrangement in his head and not touch a musical instrument and the music would come out exactly the way it sounded in his head.

Mr. Charles thank you for being the angel of soul, you will be missed.

MOURNING THE PASSING OF
PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN

SPEECH OF

HON. JIM KOLBE

OF ARIZONA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 8, 2004

Mr. KOLBE. Mr. Speaker, Ronald Reagan's passing gives this nation an opportunity to reflect on the can-do attitude that he exuded and the greatness of the American people that he believed in. He was the essential American, a President born in mid-America, instilled with solid Midwestern values. He had a deep love affair with the American people, and they with him. Like Franklin Roosevelt, he was an American icon, and like Roosevelt, he had an uncanny ability to connect and communicate with common people.

Today we salute four tenets of President Reagan's legacy: economic growth, deregulation, peace through strength, and patriotism through a return of the American dream.

The father of Reaganomics launched the boldest economic plan since FDR that promoted lower taxes, sound money, and less regulation. Reagan unveiled a "program for economic recovery" to a Joint Session of Congress calling for a \$41.4 billion in tax cuts—the largest in history.

Reagan was an advocate for deregulation and free trade pacts. He worked to tear down barriers to enterprise and encourage a spirit of self enterprise. His commitment to deregulation was evident when in 1981 he took decisive action to carry out this promise to fire 13,000 air traffic controllers for an illegal strike.

After years of crumbling defense spending, President Reagan increased defense spending 35 percent during two terms and promoted peace through strength. He called the Soviet Union for what it was—an evil empire—and by

standing firm against it hastened the end of the Cold War and the return of Russia to the family of nations.

Influenced by his humble beginnings, Reagan's patriotism and optimistic spirit exemplified the American dream. He restored America's "can do" creed. We will always remember the words of his farewell address, when he said those of his generation "were taught, very directly, what it means to be an American. And we absorbed, almost in air, a love of country and an appreciation of its institutions."

He never trimmed his sails or compromised his values. We will remember him as a president who understood the balance between pragmatism and partisanship. We will remember him as the great communicator who united Americans toward common goals. But most of all we will remember him as a great president who brought honor and respect to the Office of President. I join with all Americans in expressing our sympathy to Nancy Reagan and his family for the loss of this great American.

MOURNING THE PASSING OF
PRESIDENT RONALD REAGAN

SPEECH OF

HON. PETER HOEKSTRA

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, June 8, 2004

Mr. HOEKSTRA. Mr. Speaker, today I rise in honor of Ronald Reagan, 40th President of the United States and one of the greatest leaders and statesmen of the 20th Century.

America has long known that President Reagan was ill, but his death came as a shock to a country that continued to feel his presence. He touched millions of lives during his tenure as governor of California and two terms in America's highest office. Although long anticipated, his passing marks with finality the end of the Reagan era.

President Reagan's commitment to freedom altered the course of modern history. He brought the United States through the end of the Cold War with strength and resolve, and he led the U.S. economy to heights once unimaginable through his sound domestic policies.

He possessed a vision for America that reflected its devotion to individual liberty, that every person is born with the intrinsic right to achieve their dreams through their own labors and determination.

He will forever be remembered as a champion of promoting peace and prosperity throughout the world with a strong faith at the core of his principles and values. He was a great man elected to take charge of a great country at a time when strong leadership was sorely needed.

President Reagan's infectious optimism inspired many Americans to become involved in the political process, and his influence and vision will continue to live throughout the ages.

My prayers and those of my family are with the family and hundreds of millions of friends of President Reagan, knowing that the Lord has preserved a very special place for him in heaven.