

September 2004 - The Ways of Washington

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By Congressman Jerry Moran

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Last November, I voted against legislation that created a prescription drug benefit under Medicare. This \$500 billion plan was a significant part of the Republican agenda. During my eight years as a state senator in Topeka, and in the eight years I have had the honor to represent Kansans in the U.S. House of Representatives, I have never been under such pressure to vote contrary to what I thought was right as I was with this vote. The way I was being pressured to vote was not in the best interest of the folks back in Kansas, nor was it good for our country.

I do believe Medicare should provide a prescription drug benefit for seniors, especially for those that could not otherwise afford their medicines. This is an important issue to me; I believe that the cost of health care and prescription drugs remains the top issue facing our country. However, the bill that Congress approved fell short. My greatest concern is that it does nothing to reduce the price of prescription drugs, instead forcing taxpayers to pick up the tab. The prescription drug plan may bankrupt the Medicare trust fund and reduce the chances that hospitals, doctors, nursing homes and home health care services will remain viable, especially in rural communities across our state.

I believe that seniors will find the drug card difficult to use because it is confusing. Furthermore, seniors will not truly benefit from the prescription drug benefit because the wholesale prices of drugs will continue to increase at a rate equal to the "savings" under the drug card. The increased co-payments will still leave seniors struggling to pay for their needed prescriptions and may, over time, force our local pharmacists out of business. In addition, the true cost of this legislation remains unknown but will certainly add trillions of dollars to the national debt.

Never were these concerns addressed. I met with House Leadership, including the Speaker, prior to the vote and informed them of my intention to vote "no." This vote put me at odds with my party's legislative agenda, but my duty is to represent the people of the First District, and that comes before partisan politics.

The First Congressional District of Kansas is considered a "safe Republican" district. Therefore the expectation is that its representative will always vote the position of Republican leadership. However, I have never considered my Congressional seat "safe," and I work hard every day to earn the right to represent the folks back home. I am a Republican, but I represent all Kansans. I represent Republican Kansans, Democrat Kansans and Kansans who don't vote.

Casting votes is a responsibility that I take seriously. I educate myself, study the issues, ask for advice, listen to Kansans, and then decide how to vote. Since being elected to Congress, I have cast thousands of votes and maintain an almost perfect voting record. I have never ducked tough issues, and I make decisions every day on what I think is in the best interests of the citizens of Kansas who elected me to work on their behalf. Sometimes that is in line with Republican leadership, other times it is not. The fact is, when it comes to choosing between what I am being told to do in Washington, D.C. and what I believe is in the best interest of Kansans, I will choose Kansans every time.