



The Olver Report

U.S. REPRESENTATIVE

JOHN W. OLVER

FIRST DISTRICT — MASSACHUSETTS

Berkshire, Hampden, Hampshire, Franklin, Worcester & Middlesex Counties

HEALTH CARE REFORM UPDATE

What I'm Fighting for in Washington

Patients' Bill of Rights

Both the House of Representatives and the Senate passed separate Patients' Bill of Rights legislation last year, but the two bills differ in significant ways. The Republican leadership in the House and Senate promised to work out an agreement, but the issue has been stalled for the past several months. I support a Patients' Bill of Rights that would:

- *ensure patients have access to all needed care;*
- *allow doctors and nurses to practice medicine without improper HMO and insurance company interference;*
- *give patients the ability to appeal to an independent entity if their health plan denies care;*
- *guarantee that patients can sue their health plans if they are denied necessary treatment.*

Consumers must win this fight: Congress should immediately pass a Patients' Bill of Rights to provide consumers with these enforceable patient protections.



Protecting and Strengthening Social Security and Medicare

Social Security is the main source of retirement income for two-thirds of our nation's seniors. Last year alone, Social Security benefits lifted roughly 15 million senior citizens out of poverty and under current estimates, Social Security will run dry by the end of 2034. Today, Social Security takes in more payroll taxes than it pays out in benefits and is building up its trust fund to pay for future beneficiaries. But as the baby boom generation retires and life expectancies continue to rise, the number of people age 65 and older will double by 2035.

I support a Democratic budget plan that would extend the solvency of Social Security to 2050 by dedicating interest savings on the national debt to improving Social Security's finances. I also support a plan that would strengthen Medicare by dedicating a portion of the non-Social Security surplus to extend Medicare's solvency from 2015 to 2025.

I oppose plans that would use the non-Social Security surplus to provide the wealthiest Americans a large tax cut at the expense of bedrock programs like Medicare and Social Security. Providing a fiscally irresponsible tax cut without first protecting Medicare and Social Security is a mistake that would sacrifice these important programs for future generations.

Medicare Prescription Drugs

Prescription drugs are unaffordable for many seniors because their health coverage is inadequate. Typically, seniors either participate in the traditional Medicare program and have no drug coverage, or they are in Medicare HMOs, which provide very limited drug coverage. Unfortunately, too many seniors must choose between food and medicine. To address this problem, I support a Democratic plan that would use the non-Social Security surplus to help pay for a much-needed Medicare prescription drug benefit.

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I and many of my colleagues believe that Congress must pass legislation *this year* that adds a prescription drug benefit to Medicare. However, profitable drug companies and those in Congress opposed to any expansion of Medicare have been able to stop this law from passing. We must break through this obstacle and enact prescription drug coverage for all of our nation's seniors.

Hospitals, Home Health Care, and Nursing Homes — more relief is needed

Last year, Congress passed a Balanced Budget Corrections bill aimed at undoing some of the damage that was done to health care providers by severe cuts to the Medicare program enacted in 1997. The new law provides an additional \$270 million to Massachusetts hospitals over the next five years, as well as providing financial assistance to nursing homes and home health care agencies.

This was an important step, but more must be done. Congress must continue to ensure that hospitals can provide invaluable services to their communities; that

home health agencies can flourish and continue to advance the contemporary manner in which health care is delivered today; and that nursing homes, plagued by the inability to pay qualified and committed staff, can afford to provide seniors with the health care and support they need and deserve in their day-to-day lives.

Toward this end, I support creating a \$1,000 refundable tax credit for families who provide long-term care for loved ones. In addition, we should establish Medicare benefits to cover long-term care. Many chronic conditions, like congestive heart failure or diabetes, can be treated and monitored at home. At-home care for these conditions can be more cost effective and less disruptive for patients and their families.

Finally, I am also working to reform and encourage the use of hospice care benefits. Unfortunately, current rules governing hospice care offer physicians few incentives to recommend this alternative for their patients. This misguided policy should be reversed — to help bring about a healthier future for us all!



Congressman Olver addresses seniors about establishing a prescription drug benefit through Medicare.

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Official Business

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John W. Olver".

M.C.
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