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Preserving Social Security

Rep. Israel believes that we need to protect and preserve Social Security so that Americans can retire with peace of mind. He has opposed efforts to privatize Social Security because of the high risk involved with market fluctuations. Rep. Israel is open to Social Security reform efforts that do not turn the program into a stock market risk or otherwise undermine a program on which so many seniors depend.

In March 2009, the Congressional Budget Office forecast that there will not be a Social Security Cost-of-Living Adjustment (COLA) for at least three years, making things even harder on seniors who are struggling to get by in this difficult economic climate.

Rep. Israel supports legislation in the 111th Congress to address this problem, the Consumer Price Index for Elderly Consumers Act (H.R.2365). The calculation used for seniors is unfortunately based on prices of goods and services for younger workers, whereas seniors are facing skyrocketing health care and energy costs. Rep. Israel supports legislation that would ask the Bureau of Labor Statistics to publish a Consumer Price Index for Elderly Consumers, which would take into consideration the different costs faced by seniors.

Rep. Israel also voted in favor of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (H.R.1), which included a one-time payment of \$250 to retirees, disabled veterans and SSI recipients.

Prescription Drug Prices Hard on Seniors

Affordable health care is increasingly dependent on affordable prescription medicines. Too many seniors are forced to go across the border to Canada or simply forgo purchasing their prescription drugs because of the high cost of medicine today. The cost of prescription drugs is increasing at double-digit rates, and seniors on fixed incomes are disproportionately affected by this.

Rep. Israel believes we should fund research on the effectiveness of cheaper alternatives to heavily marketed drugs. He is also fighting the powerful drug lobby in Washington to permit the re-importation of safe, legal drugs from Canada, where American consumers can pay up to 50 percent less for their prescriptions.

Rep. Israel cosponsored the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act of 2007. This legislation, which passed the House of Representatives on January 12, 2007, requires the Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services to negotiate with drug companies for lower prices for Medicare recipients.

Nassau-Suffolk Medicare Disparity

Rep. Israel is working to lower health care costs for Suffolk County seniors. Although Nassau and Suffolk counties are contiguous, there are significant disparities in premiums paid by Medicare recipients in each county. In 2008, HIP and Mediblu (formerly Empire Blue Cross), two of the most popular Medicare Advantage plans on Long Island, offered plans in Nassau County that charge no additional premium for health and drug coverage. In Suffolk County however, HIP and Mediblu charge \$99.50 and \$69.00 per month, respectively. According to Association of Health Insurance Plans (AHIP), the difference in the monthly reimbursement rate between Nassau and Suffolk Counties is approximately \$54.00.

Insurers in Suffolk County are reimbursed at a rate that is 6% less than insurers providing the same services in Nassau County. This is partially due to the fact that Medicare does not account for health care provided at the Northport Veterans Administration Medical Center (located in Suffolk County) when determining reimbursements, even though it is required by law to take VA services and patients into account. The lower payments mean that Medicare Advantage plans have had to raise premiums dramatically in Suffolk County above what they charge in Nassau County for the same or similar coverage.

Rep. Israel, along with Rep. Tim Bishop, introduced legislation (H.R. 2686) in June 2009 to equalize reimbursements to the higher of two in the case of two contiguous counties when one has a VA Medical Center in its boundaries and the other does not. Reps. Israel and Bishop also introduced this bill in the 110th Congress.