



Montana Senior Citizens Assn. Inc.

WITH AFFILIATED CHAPTERS THROUGHOUT THE STATE

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Chairman Keane and members of the committee for the record my name is Betty Beverly Executive Director of Montana Senior Citizens Assn. MSCA is celebrating 31 years of serving and giving a voice to Montana's seniors and their families.

I rise in guarded support of HB 364 but with thanks to Representative Maedje for bringing this issue forward for discussion. As many of you know the United States Congress has a bill to allow re-importation of prescription drugs from Canada and many states already have similar laws enacted even though it is illegal now to re-import drugs from Canada.

Montanans, like the rest of our U.S. population have been dealing with the rising costs of prescription drugs. Seniors live on fixed incomes that, at best, are adjusted for inflation each year, with medications becoming increasingly unaffordable. Many seniors have no-or only skimpy drug coverage. Since the new Medicare legislation enacted in 2003 will mainly go into effect in 2006, with no bargaining power for better drug prices, this law is unlikely to provide a meaningful cost reduction. Families USA has published a report called "Sticker Shock: Rising Prescription Drug Prices for Seniors." They state that 30 brand name drugs dispensed to seniors have increased by nearly 22 percent over the past three years. Just last year prices, on average, rose by 4.3 times the rate of inflation.

Since the early 1990's MSCA has been working on finding a solution to the rising costs of health care especially prescription drugs. Busloads of senior went to Canada and talked with seniors there and physicians to try and find a solution. MSCA also did several surveys of drug prices at pharmacies in Montana cities and found that seniors should shop around since some pharmacies in their town charged much more for the same drug. Educating seniors about the asking for samples of new drugs to make sure they are able to take them; asking if there is a generic for the drug they are taking; and applying for some of the Pharmaceutical drug cards that are available depending on income guidelines; has been MSCA's goal these past years.

Many of Montana's seniors rode the bus to Canada with now Governor Brian Schweitzer, six years ago and I was one of them. After finding out about the large amounts of money saved by buying in Canada, many seniors have continued to buy their drugs in Canada with savings of up to \$500 over a 3-month period. Many seniors who are disabled or homebound are unable to travel so they have to pay the higher prices. This could be solved with this bill. I get many calls from the disabled and single moms who cannot afford the high price of a drug that is prescribed. So this shows that not only seniors are affected but all Montanans, especially those on fixed and low-incomes.

I applaud Rep. Maedje for putting in the provision to allow Montana pharmacies to purchase drugs in bulk to be able to pass the savings on to Montanans. MSCA has worked with the Pharmacist Assn. because we feel that in rural Montana especially, the local pharmacy is a friend and helps seniors keep track of the many drugs they take.

I invite the committee to have lunch with seniors from across the state next week during "Senior Lobby Days" Feb. 1, 2 and 3rd to talk about this important issue. We are easy to spot with our grey hair!!



MSCA is a non-profit, non-partisan, grassroots membership organization serving all Montana's seniors, their children and grandchildren. It's not about how old you are - it's about your future!