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Older Voters Say Congress Should Reject Medicare Drugs Deal, Go Back to Work, New National Survey Shows

Hart Research Survey Was Conducted Nov 17 – 18

WASHINGTON, Nov 19 – Older voters express serious concerns about the new congressional deal to add a prescription drug benefit under Medicare and say lawmakers should go back to work to produce a better deal, according to a new nationally representative survey of U.S. voters age 55 and older. Only 19 percent of older voters say Congress should pass the bill while 64 percent say Congress should go back to work. The survey was conducted November 17-18 by Hart Research, following the announcement of the key components of the deal. It was commissioned by the AFL-CIO, which represents 13 million U.S. workers and three million retirees.

Among AARP members, who made up 57 percent of all respondents, only 18 percent say Congress should pass the bill as is; 65 percent say Congress should go back to work.

Only 16 percent of Medicare beneficiaries who lack drug benefits say Congress should pass the current bill.

After hearing a basic description of the plan's drug benefit and before hearing about other provisions, 65 percent of seniors express an unfavorable view compared to 26 percent who are favorable. The following details were provided to older voters: prescription drug coverage will be provided by private companies under contract with Medicare, it is voluntary, it carries a \$35 monthly premium and a \$275 deductible and it covers 75 percent of drug costs up to \$2,200, then 95 percent of costs over \$5,000. Unfavorable reactions are more intense to the basic plan than are favorable reactions, with 38 percent saying they are very unfavorable and just five percent saying they are very favorable.

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Only 27 percent of Medicare beneficiaries say they are likely to enroll in the program.

“When they get the details of this deal, older voters will be furious with their representatives,” said John Sweeney, president of the AFL-CIO. “Congress should go back to work and come up with a meaningful benefit that doesn’t jeopardize the coverage seniors now have. The primary beneficiary of this deal is the pharmaceutical industry.”

By a two to one margin, older voters say passing legislation to control excessive prices that pharmaceutical companies charge for prescription drugs should be a higher priority for Congress than passing prescription drug coverage for senior citizens under Medicare (53 percent to 25 percent, with 17 percent saying both equally).

Older voters express serious concerns about key provisions of the proposed changes to Medicare:

- 78 percent say the bill does not do enough to protect current retiree plans, given nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates that some two million retirees are likely to lose coverage under the plan.
- 65 percent are unfavorable to the provision that would increase subsidies to private health plans like HMOs and PPOs to help them compete and sign up seniors for Medicare coverage.
- 60 percent are unfavorable to the provision that would merge the trust funds and establish a potential cap on Medicare funding.
- 64 percent are unfavorable to the provision that would prevent the importation of lower-cost drugs from Canada and forbids Medicare from negotiating with drug companies to reduce costs.

Among older voters, 72 percent say they feel positively about Medicare today.

The margin of error in the survey is plus or minus 4 percent.

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