

March 21, 2011

U.S. Senator Herb Kohl Visits St. Ann Center and Addresses the Future of SeniorCare

Senator Herb Kohl visited and toured St. Ann Center, hosted by Center president, Sr. Edna Lonergan and Board Chair Jim Lenahan. They also were accompanied by Stephanie Sue Stein, executive director of Milwaukee Department of Aging and Nino Amato, president and executive director of CWAG- Coalition of Wisconsin Aging Groups. Senator Kohl spoke to a crowd of older adults who had gathered in the Center's atrium to hear him speak and take the opportunity to ask him questions.



He told the crowd that on March 17 he had urged Health and Human Services Secretary Kathleen Sebelius to deny any request to change Wisconsin's popular prescription drug program, SeniorCare. In 2007 and 2009, Kohl fought to extend the SeniorCare program, which was established by Gov. Tommy Thompson in 2002.

Kohl asked the Secretary to preserve the current federal SeniorCare waiver that he had negotiated. Any change to the program must be approved by the Health and Human Services Secretary. Under the terms of the 1115 Medicaid waiver that authorizes the program, changes to SeniorCare are prohibited without federal approval.

"SeniorCare has proven to be an efficient, cost-effective choice for Wisconsin seniors. It would be a mistake to dismantle this program, which provides exceptional coverage while saving consumers, taxpayers and the state money. I'm confident that the Administration recognizes the value of SeniorCare," Kohl said.

According to the Department of Health in Wisconsin, in 2009, the average annual federal cost per enrollee for SeniorCare was \$588, less than half the \$1,690 federal government spent to subsidize a Part D participant. SeniorCare negotiates lower drug prices and saved \$50 million in 2009 alone. SeniorCare currently has a \$20 million surplus that the State of Wisconsin wants to use to plug the budget deficit.

Because Medicare Part D does not negotiate drug prices, most, if not all, Wisconsin seniors enrolled in SeniorCare would see the cost of their medicines rise. Wisconsin would no longer receive drug rebates through negotiation, further padding drug company profits.

As Chairman of the Senate Special Committee on Aging Senator Kohl joins with Ranking Member Bob Corker in leading the committee to explore and investigate issues that concern all elderly Americans.