AARP Endorses Health Care Bill HR 3962

Local News

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OLYMPIA, Wash. - The nation's leading senior's lobby, *AARP*, is using its considerable clout in the health care reform debate by endorsing the Affordable Health Care for America Act, set to be considered by the U.S. House of Representatives this weekend. This is the first time the group has endorsed a particular bill. Washington state is home to 935,000 of AARP's 40 million members; the group has determined most of them would benefit if the bill passed.

Ingrid McDonald, advocacy director for AARP Washington, says protecting Medicare for those 65 and older is one of the group's top priorities, and she feels this legislation does that.

"Unless we make some smart changes now to make the program more efficient and viable, it won't be around for people's children and grandchildren. This health reform package would secure the program for the future and improve it immediately for current beneficiaries, by closing the 'donut hole' and other measures."

The "donut hole" is coverage gap that leaves some seniors on Medicare paying their drug costs out of pocket. AARP acknowledges that any House bill still would have to be combined with Senate legislation to create a final bill.

In a state like Washington, where almost one-third of the population is over age 50, the proposed changes are significant, adds McDonald. She says insurance companies could not charge an older person any more than twice what a younger person pays for the same health coverage, or deny coverage to anyone based on pre-existing conditions, which means more adults could get insurance.

"I talk to way too many people who are in their fifties or in early sixties, who are completely uninsured, and that's a very challenging place to be. This bill would provide a lot of help making products more accessible and affordable, so people can protect themselves and get the care they need."

Critics of the endorsement argue AARP is supporting it because the organization stands to profit when Medicare is cut by $400 billion, driving seniors to spend more on Medicare supplementary

coverage, which AARP promotes for royalty fees. Some also criticize the cuts to Medicare at a time when baby boomers are joining the ranks of the retired and increasing demands on the program. But, supporters say the bill would create more competition, lower costs, and improve quality. Other high-profile endorsements for the bill came Wednesday from the American Medical Association and American Cancer Society.