

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Representative Xavier Becerra (CA – 31), the only congressional member from Southern California who is on the House Committee on Ways and Means, voted last night against sending H.R. 2473, the Medicare Prescription Drug and Modernization Act of 2003, to the House Floor.

The bill, however, passed in the Ways and Means Committee 25 to 15.

Soon after the vote, Rep. Becerra issued the following statement:

“Republican rhetoric on this issue may be compassionate, but this legislation is callous. The 10-year, approximately \$400 billion Medicare overhaul plan approved by the Ways and Means Committee tonight undermines the 38-year-old system by setting it on a course to privatization.

“Seniors would be forced to purchase plans covering both healthcare and prescription drugs offered by private insurance companies who are reimbursed by the federal government. But rather than regulate the costs of these programs, the Republican plan only makes suggestions about the costs of an insurance provider’s premiums and deductibles. Thus, seniors would be at the whim of private insurers who may or may not provide affordable coverage, particularly in less profitable markets – such as rural and low-income urban areas.

“The House Democratic bill, H.R. 1199, the Medicare Prescription Drug Benefit and Discount Act of 2003, guarantees lower drug prices, a monthly premium of only \$25, and a low deductible of \$100. Whereas the plan passed by the Ways and Means Committee ensures more hassle, the Democratic bill ensures better healthcare – and does it at a lower cost to seniors. In contrast, the partisan Ways and Means bill costs seniors more and comes with zero guarantees. But the most important part of the Democratic plan is that our nation’s seniors get to stay in Medicare and will have access to a strong and affordable prescription drug program.

“Our nation’s greatest generation deserves a Medicare prescription drug program that is universal, equitable, accessible, and cost effective. If a senior citizen asks her government, ‘Will I be able to afford prescription drugs?’, she needs to know that Republicans have put forth a plan that answers the question with a ‘Maybe, but ...’, while Democrats have written legislation

that says, 'It's guaranteed.'"

As the Medicare debate continues on Capitol Hill, Rep. Becerra will continue to make himself available for interviews on this important subject matter. For those interested, please call Steve Haro at 213.819.0004.