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MATTERS OF OPINION

Rx to help black elders' manage cost of prescriptions

Black seniors can take advantage of Medicare's Part D benefit

By Marie Smith
SPECIAL TO THE POST

For years, AARP pushed for prescription drug coverage to be added to Medicare. The new Part D drug benefit represents Medicare's most significant change in its 40-year history. Millions of older Americans and individuals with disabilities are realizing substantial savings through Part D, while being protected from unseen costs in the future.

This is a vital opportunity for older African Americans to get help paying for their medications. But African American enrollment in Part D has been low, to date Dr. Sandra L. Gadson, President of the National Medical Association (the largest African American professional health organization), recently issued a call to action to African American community leaders to push for greater participation. AARP is adding its voice to Dr. Gadson's. Medicare beneficiaries need to know about this new benefit and that they must enroll before the May 15 deadline.

Beneficiaries with limited incomes may qualify for extra help, which means they do not have to pay deductibles or monthly premiums, and their co-pays for medications are very low - in some cases, nearly all prescription costs are covered. AARP is working hard to help African Americans with limited incomes understand the new coverage and to be aware of the extra help

that qualified individuals can receive. Six to seven million beneficiaries nationwide may be eligible for extra help, yet so far only 1.5 million have been qualified. For North Carolina individuals with income less than \$14,700 per year or couples with annual income less than \$19,800, a simple, toll-free call to SHIP - The North Carolina Seniors' Health Insurance Information Program is the best way to find out about extra help (1-800-443-9354). Someone at that number will refer



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individuals to a trained counselor in their own community.

AARP volunteers across the country are educating communities about Medicare's new prescription drug benefit. Information on AARP's website - AARP.org - and in our free booklets explains the new benefit and the extra help in laymen's terms. Booklets can be downloaded from the website or ordered by calling AARP, 888-687-2277.

Selecting a prescription drug plan in Medicare Part D involves time and effort, but it's worth it. Some beneficiaries haven't enrolled because they already have "creditable" prescription drug coverage through an employer or other source, meaning their coverage is considered to be at least as good as a Part D plan. For these beneficiaries, there is no penalty if they don't enroll. All others who don't enroll by May 15 will pay increasingly higher premiums the longer they wait and will not be able to get coverage until January 2007.

For Medicare beneficiaries who have struggled to afford costly prescriptions, help is finally here. Enroll now for immediate savings and long-term peace of mind. You'll be glad you did.

MARIE SMITH is president of the American Association of Retired Persons, a national advocacy group for mature adults and seniors.

Liar, Liar, beware of spreading political fire in Washington

Someone said, "Get all the fools on your side and you can be elected to anything."

More and more, as I watch and listen to the "Resident," I am convinced that there must be a lot of fools who vote. Don't miss understand, a fool is not necessarily someone who is uneducated or uneducated. Remember our grandparents calling people, "Educated fools?"

The evidence abounds that this country has an abundance of fools, many of whom are well educated, wealthy, and refined, that continue to support the Resident and the ridiculous things he says and does.

First of all, let's call it like it is.

The Resident is a liar; Rumsfeld is a liar; Cheney is a liar; and Condoleezza Rice is a liar. No need to recount

all the lies they have told; if you have paid just a little attention to them you know they are all liars. And let's not use euphemisms like "misspoken words," "misinterpretations," "taken out of context."

No, they are plain and simple lies, and the folks running this country are plain and simple liars.

It would require reams of paper to cite all of the problems caused by these liars and the lies they have told - and continue to tell. Remarkably, most of us know they are lying, but we refuse to call them on it.

Consequently, we find ourselves in a quagmire in Iraq, preparing for an unprecedented long-term presence in that country by building a \$1 billion Embassy, the largest in the world. Osama Bin Laden?

The Resident says, "I don't know where he is; I really don't spend a lot of time on [looking for him]. Say what?"

Our secretaries of Defense

and State fly around the world, at our expense, arrogantly threatening other countries, and lying through their teeth about how well things are going in Iraq. Our "Vice" Resident is one who knows where, doing who knows what, raking in money (What was it? A \$1.8 million tax refund?) from a company with which he said he has no financial interests: Halliburton.

We have a new press secretary, one who now has to defend the policies of a guy he has trashed in the past. Talk about walling; it is amazing what some people will do for politics. We have a lackluster, do nothing, unaccountable Congress that hardly ever works and sits idly by while the Resident lies, defies, and plays them like a bunch of idiots.

Anyone who votes for a Congressperson, a senator, or a governor who supports the current resident of 1600 Pennsylvania Avenue should be given at least 30 days in

organizers, helped revamp the effort. "We are asking individuals to keep from spending a penny that day," LULAC National President Hector M. Flores said in a statement. "We are also asking students to stay in school on that day and not make any purchases. We do not want children out of school or people missing work without permission from their employers. We ask that people be disciplined and responsible and to show our respect yet make a clear statement."

Monday was also International Workers Day, a holiday that began in the 1880s. Flores said it is celebrated in every country except the U.S., Canada and South Africa.

In making the case for a sensitive immigration policy, Latino leaders point to a UCLA study by Raul Hinojosa that shows the combined value of undocumented immigrants labor, stimulus to the economy and taxes exceeds \$890 billion a year. According to the study, those immigrants use only \$43 billion in public services annually, most of it in education and emergency care.

"Undocumented" immigrants contribute about \$850 billion more per year than they cost - a huge net gain for the United States," said Brent Wilkes, national executive director of LULAC. "It's about time that we provide a legal avenue for them to come here in recognition of their tremendous contributions to our country."

While Monday's modified "Day of Absence" was met with mixed results, there is no doubt that Latino street demonstrations in more than 75 cities on April 10 showed that old civil rights tactics can still be effective. I emphasize the word can. Sadly, on the same day at least 500,000 were marching in Los Angeles, less than 10,000 - possibly less than 5,000 - African-Americans were marching in New Orleans to protect the voting rights of displaced residents. Even with Jesse Jackson, Al Sharpton and the heads of the NAACP and the National Urban League present, the turnout was a disappointment. If we can't do any better than that, it's time for Act II.

I don't have all of the answers and don't know what should constitute Act II. That should be a community decision. But I do know what it should not be; it should not be an over reliance on press conferences and street demon-

strations. We shouldn't rule demonstrations out, but we should use them more sparingly. It's time to develop some different approaches. Let's face it: There is an eagerness on the part of many to focus on the growing Hispanic population and ignore the long-standing needs that Blacks are entitled to. It is our job, however, to stand up and be counted. This is not about being the flavor of the month, but, as Dr. Martin Luther King put it, collecting on the bounced check, marked insufficient funds, that our nation has given its black citizens.

As we attempt to collect on this overdue check, I guess Act II means not waiting on another Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X, Whitney Young, Roy Wilkins, Huey P. Newton or Stokely Carmichael. Act II can begin by doing what we can do as individuals and groups to uplift the people who need it most. Sometimes that might be through organized civil rights groups and at other times it may mean an individual act. Whatever we do, we can't afford to be absent from the struggle.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com.

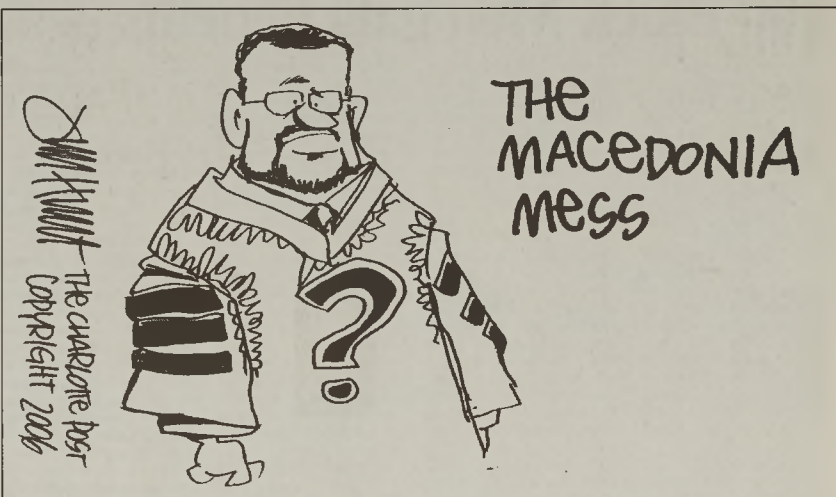
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head of Exxon gets \$400 million. What compassion!

Some 2394 young people have been killed in Iraq, and The Resident has the nerve to say they did not die in vain. How can that be true when they died for a lie? And to justify those deaths, our Resident says we must stay in Iraq and allow more soldiers to be killed. The Resident and his crew must be planning to have vacation homes in Iraq, and that's why they are spending so much money there. Oh yes, and they don't like their future neighbor, Iran; so let the gentrification begin.

Using the same argument that got us into Iraq, they are now making every effort to justify going into Iran. The Resident doesn't want Iranians to have "nuclear" capability nor even "nuclear" know-how. It's all right for India, Pakistan, North Korea, and Israel to have them, however. Maybe this country should be the ones banned from having these

weapons. We are the only one to have ever used them, and are now threatening to use them on Iran.

Liars, Liars, all of them. They have taken this world to a new low and have presided over five and a half years of chaos, confusion, charades, and political comedy, that is, if you have the stomach to laugh at the Great Decider's ignorant and childlike attempts at explaining himself to the American people. We have been bushwhacked for five years, and now we will be subjected to a "Snow job" each time there is a White House press conference.

What lies (pardon the pun) ahead for us? God only knows, but in the meantime let's do something. Gas prices? Select two or three local companies and do not support them, especially Exxon.

JAMES E. CLINGMAN, a professor at the University of Cincinnati, is former editor of the Cincinnati Herald newspaper.