

FROM WASHINGTON OFFICE
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Medicare Bill Gets Go Ahead From House Unit

WASHINGTON (BP)-- An expanded version of President Johnson's proposed program of medical care for the aged under Social Security cleared the House Ways and Means Committee here. This marks the first time that a health insurance program for the elderly has cleared the committee for House action. Such measures have been approved by the Senate in the past.

The bill contains some features of alternative proposals offered by longtime opponents of medical care, as well as the original Administration program. It provides for a voluntary insurance plan covering doctors' fees in addition to the basic hospital and nursing-care benefits proposed by the Administration.

It would also provide increased federal participation, liberalized eligibility rules and broader coverage under the existing state-federal system of care for low-income persons. A seven per cent increase in cash benefits under the present Social Security insurance program would be provided.

The American Medical Association (AMA), vigorous opponent of medical care for the elderly under Social Security, offered an alternative plan, known as "eldercare." Republican leadership in Congress came up with their own alternative proposal. These plans would be voluntary and would be financed mainly by federal general funds rather than through the Social Security system. A number of other proposals have been offered by various Congressmen.

The expanded "medicare" bill would provide basic hospital and nursing benefits which would be financed by increased Social Security taxes and would be available to all persons over 65. Benefits would include up to 60 days of hospital care for each period of illness, of which the patient would pay the first \$40.

All services ordinarily furnished by a hospital for in-patients, except doctors' fees, would be covered. From 20 to 100 days of post-hospital care in approved nursing homes and up to 100 home-nursing visits would be provided. Provisions would also be made for out-patient hospital diagnostic services.

The House Ways and Means Committee added to the Administration bill a voluntary insurance plan available to persons over 65 for coverage of doctors' fees and various other health services. Participants would pay premiums of \$3 which would be matched by the federal government. The insured would pay the first \$50 of these costs and would then receive coverage for 80 per cent of the remaining costs.

Administration officials estimate that \$5.5 billion of benefits would be paid in the first full year of operation. The basic health services and higher cash benefits would be financed by a series of increases in Social Security taxes on a broader wage base.

AMA's "eldercare" plan, sponsored by Reps. A. Sydney Herlong Jr. (D., Fla.) and Thomas B. Curtin (R., Mo.), would provide a voluntary medical insurance program for all persons 65 and older. A state would have to take part in the plan before it would be available to its citizens.

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Federal matching grants would be made to the states for purchasing private medical insurance for the aged and participants would pay premiums. Benefits would vary according to the private insurance policies but coverage would include hospital, nursing home, medical, surgical and drug costs.

The Republican leadership proposal, introduced by Rep. John W. Byrnes (R., Wis.), health insurance program for persons 65 and older. It would be financed by a graduated premium contribution by the participant, by contributions from states, and by appropriations from federal general revenues.

Benefits under the Republican plan would include 100 per cent of the first \$1,000 of hospital and nursing home room and board, 80 per cent of other hospital charges and surgical and medical costs after a deductible of \$50, and up to \$40,000 in case of a "catastrophic illness."

According to the Harris Survey the American people would welcome any of a variety of national health plans for the elderly. The Harris Survey is a polling service of the Washington Post, daily newspaper in the Nation's Capital.

The survey revealed that "feelings run strongly" about getting some medical plan under way and that "majorities in almost all groups of citizens are willing to support" either the Administration's medicare plan or the AMA's eldercare plan. However, when given a choice, the poll showed that a government tax-financed program is favored 4 to 3 over a privately financed program.

Companion health care proposals have been introduced in the Senate. The Senate Finance Committee has indicated that hearings will be held when the House takes action. The House bill must first clear the Rules Committee before it can come to the floor for debate.

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Fino Asks Open Mails
For Lottery Tickets

(3-26-65)

WASHINGTON (BP)-- Rep. Paul A. Fino, longtime advocate of a national lottery, re-introduced in Congress his bill to permit and allow distribution of lottery tickets through the U. S. mails.

The proposed legislation would make it possible for residents of other states to participate via the mails in the New Hampshire state lottery. U. S. postal regulations forbid the use of mails in connection with a lottery. Similar legislation has also been introduced by Rep. Abraham J. Multer (D., N.Y.).

Fino pointed out that obviously the tickets are going through the mails anyway since only 13 per cent of last year's winners of the New Hampshire sweepstakes were residents of that state.

"Clearly, the tickets just did not pick themselves up and fly all over the world," the Congressman said.

He urged Congress to remove restrictions against mailing lottery tickets "so long as the lottery ticket is mailed in a state where the conduct of such lotteries is legal." New Hampshire's lottery has been in operation since 1963.

Earlier this year Fino introduced a bill calling for a national lottery. He has introduced similar bills in each Congress since 1953.

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Baptist School Gets
College Housing Loan

(3-26-65)

WASHINGTON (BP)-- A Baptist school in Virginia is one of six church-related colleges receiving a total of \$9,616,000 in college housing loans, according to the Housing and Home Finance Agency here.

Virginia Union University in Richmond, affiliated with the American Baptist Convention, received a \$2,815,000 loan. Two new dormitories and a combination student union-dining hall facility will be constructed.

Also receiving government loans are two Methodist schools, a Catholic, a Disciple of Christ, and a Lutheran college.

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Proposes More Freedom In Civil Service Jobs

WASHINGTON (BP)-- Legislation to "permit devoutly religious people greater opportunity to hold federal civil service positions" will be sponsored in the House of Representatives according to a New York Congressman.

Rep. Jonathan B. Bingham (D., N.Y.) said he would sponsor a bill to provide that persons who could not work on a particular day because of religious reasons be allowed to work on another day.

"Virtually every major religion has certain holy days which the devout observe at their place of worship and so cannot go to their regular places of employment," Bingham said. He referred to Orthodox Jews who cannot work on Friday evening or Saturday, and to Seventh Day Adventists who cannot work on Saturday. Many Christians observe Good Friday, Christmas and Easter, he observed.

The Congressman's proposed legislation is aimed at requirements of the Post Office and some other civil service agencies that employees must be available for work any day of the week or year.

A spokesman in the Congressman's office said the proposal would be that to the extent that the nature of the job would allow and that the applicant is willing to work on another day, he should not be disqualified for employment or upgrading.

The spokesman said that a constituent reported to the Congressman that in order to qualify for upgrading in his work he had been asked to sign a form saying he could work any day in the year. Even though assurance had been given that provisions would be made for those days he could not work, the constituent did not feel he could honestly sign the form.

Bingham said he was "surprised and distressed to discover that the federal government in practice penalizes those who conscientiously observe their religious obligations."

The proposal would exclude those jobs which by their nature require the person to be available at any time. This would cover persons of unique qualifications whose responsibilities could not be deferred to another day and where no one else in the operation could substitute.

"I sponsor this legislation because I feel that the present policy of the federal civil service is in effect discriminatory and because I believe that the federal government should set an example for private industry in making it possible for devoutly religious people to pursue their beliefs," Bingham said.

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Congressman Asks Curb On Teenage Drinking

(3-26-65)

WASHINGTON (BP)-- Legislation to raise the legal drinking age in the District of Columbia to 21 years has been introduced in the House of Representatives. Rep. Silvio O. Conte (R., Mass.) said this would be protection for teenagers from all over the country who visit the Nation's Capital.

Conte's bill would amend the District of Columbia Alcoholic Beverage Control Act by eliminating provisions which permit drinking of "beer and light wines" by persons 18 years old and older. The legal age for drinking these beverages would be increased to 21 as is now specified for all other alcoholic beverages in the District.

The Massachusetts Congressman observed that a person under 21 years of age is considered a minor and not legally responsible for his acts. For this reason, he said, visiting groups of young people such as school classes, church groups, Boy and Girl Scouts, and others, must be supervised and chaperoned by responsible adults.

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"It just doesn't make sense to undermine the authority and responsibility of these adults who are willing to shoulder the already tremendous burden of seeing to the safety and welfare of these young people by making every cocktail lounge and bar a source of temptation and serious trouble," he said.

Conte added that he did not like to think of a group of high school students returning to his district in Massachusetts "in the wake of a scandalous drinking incident" during their visit to Washington. He said he voiced his concern as a citizen, as a member of Congress, and as a parent.

"It is regrettable that parents all over the country may soon fear to send their youngsters on class trips and group outings to visit the Capital of the greatest nation on earth largely because of an unrealistic and, in my opinion, unhealthy law," Conte stated.

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