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SECRETARY THOMPSON: Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you again for coming to the Department of Health and Human Services for what I consider a very important day and it also is going to give us the opportunity after the press conference to leave here and go out to the other room, the adjoining room and allow some seniors to work on the web pages as well as the telephone to show how seniors will go through signing up for the drug card. So we are going to have the Press Conference, and then we are going to have a demonstration shortly thereafter.

So good morning to all of you and let me just take this opportunity again to thank you for coming here today. I am very pleased, of course, to be able to celebrate what I consider a giant step forward for seniors on the road to savings on their prescription drugs as well, of course, and most importantly, their better health's.

I am very pleased to have with me several seniors, and those who serve seniors who are ready to assist those seniors and are excited to stop paying the full price, I believe for their drugs and begin saving money on their purchases. Neil LaGrow [misspelled?] who is with us here from Culpeper, Virginia; he's 80 years young and still working so that he can afford his 11 different medications. Neil tells us that he is very happy about the new Medicare Drug Benefit. He says he has

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been waiting some time for an opportunity to save on his medicines and for drug coverage under Medicare. Now we are going to hear from him in a minute. We are also going to be joined and are joined by Amanda Smitke. She runs a program in Richmond, Virginia for seniors who don't have drug coverage. And I want to thank both of those for being here.

We also, of course, are very pleased to have a friend of mine, who is an outstanding Congressman from Georgia, Jack Kingston, and Jack, thank you very much for coming. Congressman Kingston played a very important role in helping us pass the Medicare law, and he is a big supporter of the Discount Drug Card and I am very pleased that he is here today.

We also have with us in the front row some very outstanding seniors. Gladys Parish is here, Arlene Bennett, Joan Fog, Gloria Smith, Elsie Armstead, Glenda Tomasovich, Deb Lavelly, and Laura Armstrong; would you give those seniors a big round of applause? [Applause] I am very, very pleased that they are here.

And ladies and gentlemen this is a very important day for seniors all across America. Started today, we are putting the power to save in the hands of seniors as well as Americans with disabilities by providing a Medicare approved Drug Card. For the first time, we are going to pool the purchasing power of Medicare beneficiaries to drive down the prices that they pay for prescriptions. And for the first time the industry is

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going to be posting its drug prices on a public website which is set up by our department, and is going to be competing for the business of seniors. This open competition is going to save seniors money on their prescription drugs.

In short, people with Medicare can now save on their prescription drugs. They are going to benefit from a choice in the cards as competition drives down those prices. And Medicare is going to help them choose the card that provides that senior the best savings. The drug discount cards deliver the first wave of savings authorized by the Medicare Modernization Act that Congress passed, and that President Bush signed into law in December. 40 cards are going to be available nationally, 39 national cards and then one card for long-term care which is also a national card; and another 33 which are going to be available geographically and regionally. Those make up the 73 cards. We have posted today 56 of those 73 cards. Now every day and, of course, by next Monday, we will have a lot more cards posted until we get the final 73.

The question is going to be asked why aren't they all posted today. There are some steps that have to go through to have these drug cards approved; there are advertisements and some of their other materials that they are going to hand out. That is going through the process, but we are working as fast and as diligently as we possibly can to get all the cards up by next Monday.

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The law allows for an annual enrollment fee of up to \$30 a year. Some card companies, however, are offering a smaller fee or no fee at all. Today the discount cards become available as card sponsors begin marketing their products. The savings go into effect, as we all know on June 1st, so you are going to have time now to do some window shopping because price comparisons are still going on, and of course, we still expect and anticipate that drug prices will continue to go down. So we want you to window shop, and then we are going to, of course, enroll and on June 1st you are going to have the opportunity to receive some benefits on the purchase of drugs.

So what we are encouraging the seniors to do is first spend some time, compare the cards, allow the competition to drive down the prices over the first couple weeks, and then sign up for the card that best meets your needs. Window shop, find the best price, and then get your card. Medicare is going to help seniors throughout this whole process. In fact, let me quickly outline three of the ways that Medicare is going to help seniors and persons with disabilities with the Drug Discount Card Program.

First, Medicare is saving senior's money. Right now, seniors are about the only group in America that pays the full price for their drugs. Now with this program, every time a senior with Medicare goes to the pharmacy they can take these cards and save an average of 10 to 25 percent off their

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prescription drugs; and sometimes even more. A recent survey of the participating drug card sponsors estimate that seniors will save an average of 17 percent on brand name drugs and 25 to 35 percent on generics. The benefits, of course, are going to be particularly helpful for those lower income seniors and persons with disabilities. On top of the discounts, these Americans are going to receive an additional \$1200 over the next 18 months to defray the cost of their drugs; \$600 in the remaining year of 2004 and then another \$600 in 2005.

Across the country, we estimate that more than 7 million seniors will qualify for this very generous additional benefit, and I encourage seniors as well as their caregivers to find out whether they are going to be eligible for this extra assistance. A \$600 credit is a lot of money for citizens who are struggling to pay the high cost of their prescription drugs. Seniors with the greatest need, of course, are going to get the most help. And that's the underlying theory of the whole Medicare Modernization Act is to make sure the lowest income seniors in America are going to get the highest amount of benefits.

As I said with us today is a wonderful woman, Glenda Tomasovich. Glenda is a vista volunteer who cares for Rufus and Joan Knoll, a developmentally disabled couple on Medicare. Rufus takes one drug and Joan takes two at a total cost of \$576 a year, but with an income of only \$14,232 from Social

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Security, they cannot really afford to pay for those medicines. So Glenda, very generously has been paying for their medicines. Thanks to the Medicare Drug Discount Card, Rufus and Joan are now eligible for the \$600 credit to cover their drug costs. As you see, we are going to provide real help for real people.

Second, Medicare is giving seniors a choice in the cards, and choice is always good for the consumer. Seniors have the freedom to decide which card will give them the best deals for the drugs they take, so they are going to save the most money. Choice is not only good for seniors, but also for our health care system at large. By letting seniors choose the best card for them, we are introducing competition, real competition into the drug market. As seniors compare the prices each card offers for the drugs that they typically take, companies will respond by lowering drug prices to compete for that business. This process in turn is going to drive down prices across the market.

We expect - I expect the prices to continue to fall as companies try to gain market share for the full drug benefit which is going to begin in 2006. We are also, ladies and gentlemen, encouraging competition by making the drug market a lot more transparent. Each week on Monday morning, you will see that the price comparison website at www.medicare.gov will post the prices of thousands of drug products available at nearby pharmacies. So for the first time, seniors, the press,

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Congress, and every other health insurance company and every individual can see and compare the prices that they pay for prescription drugs. This unprecedented publication of prices is going to give drug companies more incentive to lower their prices.

In fact, next Monday, next Monday, this is going to be the first week that the drug card companies are going to have the opportunity to see what their competition is putting up on the webpage. You can well imagine that next Monday we are going to see a lot of companies reducing their prices to say that they are the lowest.

So third, Medicare has given seniors and their families the tools that they need in order to choose the drug discount card that is best for them. Personalized help in choosing a card is only a phone call away at 1-800-M-E-D-I-C-A-R-E or to stop by a local senior center where our State Health Insurance Assistance Programs as well as other counselors are going to work with seniors on how to compare cards. So you walk into the senior center, we are going to have all of this information there available for you. We are going to have people there to assist you and help you make the right choice for yourself.

By calling 1-800-M-E-D-I-C-A-R-E which is staffed 24/7, and we have just tripled the number of reception and operators, people with Medicare are going to get a trained counselor who will take some basic information from the seniors;

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particularly, the medicines they take. Then the counselor will send them a personalized kit with all the information needed to compare cards and make that informed choice. Those seniors or caregivers who have a computer can visit www.medicare.gov to get the exact same price comparison information that anybody with a computer is going to be able to receive.

There is no other decision in health care where the consumer is given this much information to compare and to be able to make an informed choice. No other way and no other place in health care are you going to have so much assistance to make the right choice for you. Not in choosing your doctor, your pharmacy, or your health care coverage. The professionals at the Department of Health and Human Services and our Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services, who by the way have just worked tremendously hard to get this up and running, and I thank them for the great job that they have all done. Medicaid Service, they put a lot of work into this program and the price comparison website.

It is quite remarkable, ladies and gentlemen; that we have a benefit program up and running just five months after it became law. We are confident the program will serve seniors and Americans with disabilities very well. And rest assured, if there are bumps in the road, and there surely will be, whenever you institute a new program of this magnitude, covering this many different people with this many different

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cards, there are going to be some mistakes, there's no question about it; but those mistakes are going to be few, and we will smooth them out quickly and very efficiently. This happens to be an historic day for Medicare and the people that it serves.

For more than a decade Medicare beneficiaries have asked for help to pay for their prescription drugs. Today, that help is here. Today, people with Medicare can take that first giant step on the road to savings on prescription medicines, and saving money is better than paying full price any day of the week. With that, I'd like to now ask our wonderful Congressman, our guest, to come up here and also share with us his views and his support of the drug discount card. Congressman Kingston from Georgia, thank you.

[Applause].

CONGRESSMAN KINGSTON: Thank you very much, Mr. Secretary. Thank you very much. I am glad to be here on behalf of 435 colleagues in the United States Congress. We worked very hard on this, as you know, debated it for many years, and passed it on a bipartisan basis with the endorsement of the AARP 60 plus and many other senior and health care organizations. In fact, most of the major ones. I am also a member of that Sandwich Generation of dependent children and growing dependent parents.

My parents are separated. My dad lives in Athens, Georgia, he has immacular [misspelled] degeneration and

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Diabetes, and he is not internet savvy, but I can tell you one thing he is one of the most frugal guys in the United States of America. I often wish we had him on the Appropriations Committee when we are debating some of these things.

I talked to him about this, about how he will be able to get a 20 percent average discount on his Glucofage [misspelled?] or Lipitor or you know whatever it is. And in his condominium complex where he lives, he is surrounded by lots of seniors and they are very interested in what is going on with this. And whatever bumps in the road, they are going to overcome them, and they are going to call that toll free number and make sure that it works for them. If it doesn't, there will be other folks who out there to help them.

My mother lives in Louisville, Colorado. She's a breast cancer survivor. She takes Tomoxofin. Mom is internet savvy; she'll be on the line this morning already figuring out which one is closer to me, which pharmacist, which vendor, and can I walk there because I prefer to walk rather than spend money driving the car. But they are going to be very, very excited about that. Having a card similar to the ones that you and I have already when we go into our drug stores and our grocery stores and anywhere else that can be slid across and get a discount on their drugs; that's very exciting to them.

And I know there are people - sometimes detractors who are out there saying, well this is going to be confusing to

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America's seniors. I say they are underestimating American seniors. Particularly my dad, the guy who never would buy an FM radio in a car, never bought a car with Whitewall tires, never owned a credit card. I can tell you, ladies and gentlemen, if he can get a discount on his cards June 1st, you can bet he's going to be in line doing that. He'll find his way.

Many members of Congress are out there already talking about this. We are very proud of this legislation. In terms of some of our numbers our colleagues have already had 266 town hall meetings about this, we have written 60 letters to the editor, we have done 47 mail pieces, and given over 350 separate speeches on this. Congress is very committed. We are going to make sure that the Secretary gets whatever tools he needs to get this information out there to the seniors.

And I can promise you this; that the first step, the significant step that is being taken today is going to open up a huge market-driven force that by June 1st, there will be millions of people who are taking advantage of this very important program.

I thank the Secretary for all of his leadership, and I want to say we are with you all the way.

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Thank you very much, Congressman, for being here. It's always a delight to have you over here. Thank you for your support and your enthusiasm for this

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program. Now I would like to ask Amanda Smitke, who works with lower-income seniors in Richmond, Virginia, Amanda, to say a few words about her program and her support for this program. Amanda, thank you for being here.

MS. SMITKE: Thank you. Good morning, ladies and gentlemen. Thank you again, Secretary Thompson for inviting us here, and a special thanks also, to the seniors that came up with us from Richmond today. Again, my name is Amanda Smitke, and I manage the Medication Assistance Program at Senior Connections, the Capital Area Agency on Aging in Richmond, Virginia. The Medication Assistance Program is funded by a grant from the Richmond Memorial Foundation there at Richmond.

The basic goal of the program is to provide assistance for seniors that don't have any prescription coverage to find that financial assistance to pay for their medications. Currently in the program, we have over 420 seniors enrolled, and I have three of those seniors here with me today. Of those 420 seniors, at least 80 percent of those are going to qualify for the \$600 credit. Up until this point, we have relied on the patient assistance programs sponsored by the pharmaceutical companies and other discount card programs to provide that assistance.

Now with this new Medicare Approved Discount Drug Card, it's just opening the door so much more for these seniors, especially with the website. They've got that one place where

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they can go, they can get a list of all these, they can see the prices; they can see the discounts they are going to get, they can find out if they qualify for that \$600 credit. And again, as the Secretary said, the \$600 credit, it's tremendous for these seniors that are living here on low income.

It is so often every day as I am talking to them out in the field, they tell me well, you know, I've got all these prescriptions that I need to get filled, but I can't because if I do that I won't be able to eat this week; or I am behind in my rent because I needed to purchase these medications. So this right here is going to open up so many more doors for them and give them more of an opportunity to purchase those medications.

Over the last few days I have also had a chance to go on the website and called 1-800-M-E-D-I-C-A-R-E, and it's just an exciting program, it's a great opportunity for seniors. I know in the Richmond area, and I am sure that they are doing this all across the country, we have got a special line set up there in my agency just for questions about Medicare, just to help the seniors in that area with the website and with signing up and enrolling in these different programs. But, it's just an exciting day for seniors, and again, I want to thank the Secretary for inviting us here and for all of his hard work. Thank you. [Applause].

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Thank you, thank you very much,

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Amanda. I love your spirit and your spunk, and thank you, Amanda, for taking care of these wonderful seniors from Richmond. This young lady down here was smiling throughout your whole program, nodding in agreement, so I know she supports you a great deal, and I thank you all for being here.

Now it's my pleasure to introduce Neil LaGrow, who is 80 years young to tell his story; Neil. [Applause].

MR. LAGROW: Thank you, Mr. Secretary. Good morning, everyone.

MALE SPEAKER: Good morning.

CROWD: Good morning.

MALE SPEAKER: Good morning, Neil.

MR. LAGROW: This is an unusual appearance for me; I am not quite used to all of this, so you'll excuse me if I seem a little shy [laughter]. As I said, I am 80 years old; I have to work part time to cover my medications. I take 15 medications a day. They run me \$890 something dollars a month. I do not get that much out of Social Security, so I work for a community service organization called the Rapahadic Rapadan Community Service where I am what they call a senior supplier for the employees. I try to find people 55 and older that are able to work and willing to work that have not been on the work market for a long time, and I put them in a position where they learn to bring their skills up to date.

These citizens are also senior citizens. They have to

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be 55 and older. And the majority of them do not have an income. One lady I had when she first came on the program had \$135 dollars Food Stamps and that was everything she was getting. She now is able to get Medicare because she was too young before, she was only 57, she is now getting the Medicare Program, and she is very happy with it. This is the way I have 9 people on my program, and they are all going to be very, very enthused over this thing, just as I am. Because it means that I will not have to work so many hours; that I'll have some time to myself, I'll be able to relax, and I'll be able to just have a good time. [Laughter].

So I believe that this is a wonderful program. I have been - ever since I have heard about it, I have been looking forward to it being put into effect. And I thank everybody involved, everybody involved, for putting it into effect and for working so hard to get it to us. As a senior citizen, I thank you, as my person, I thank you. One correction I must make, in announcing the senior citizens that were present, they notified that a Laura Armstrong. Well, Laura Armstrong is my daughter, and she is not a senior citizen at this point.

[Applause]

MALE SPEAKER: Where is Laura? [Laughter]

MR. LAGROW: Right there. [Laughter]

MALE SPEAKER: We apologize.

MR. LAGROW: She is my personal secretary, so she keeps

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me on time, and keeps me going. And believe me; she has had to help me with my medications many times because I have not been able to earn enough money to pay for them. If I don't work, I don't get paid, and I can only work 20 hours a week. So it limits very much to the income I have, and what I am going to do with it, and I do have a mortgage, I do have car payments, I do have food, all this sort of stuff in addition to my medications. So it makes it a little expensive, and this is going to be a tremendous help. Thank you all. [Applause]

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Thank you very much, Neil.

Laura, I apologize to you. I'll fire the person that put her down as a senior [laughter]. Okay. The Congressman and I and Amanda and Neil will answer any questions any of the press might have. Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER 1: If you were able to choose a card only once a year, why do you think the market forces will continue to drive down costs after [inaudible]?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: For several reasons. Number one, right now you are going to see the comparisons put up on a weekly basis. So every week on Monday morning you are going to see new prices. Secondly, the seniors are growing. There are 73 cards; they are going to want to make sure that they are going to be able to get more people to be able to be enrolled. Come November, which is five months away, there is going to be an open enrollment.

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You are going to want to make sure that you satisfy the seniors that you have in your company and be able to make sure that you encourage other seniors to have it. So you are going to do everything you possibly can to serve that senior, to say, you know, Mabel, you know, she is going to talk to Sarah, and Mabel says, my card gives me this much, and Sarah says, well I don't get that much. Where do you think Sarah is going to go in November? She's going to follow Mabel, so you are going to see these drug card companies doing everything they possibly can. And then come January 1st 2006 when we open up the Drug Benefit, they'll want to be in there because maybe not all 73 companies are going to be able to make it.

So you are going to want to make sure that you are a survivor. So you are going to make sure you do everything you possibly can to serve your consumer, that senior, to give that senior the best prices that you can possibly get. That's the way it is going to continue to drive down prices, and that's why it's going to continue to serve our seniors. Yes, sir.

MALE SPEAKER 1: Mr. Secretary, there has been a call to allow a gray period for seniors who instead of window shopping maybe jumped the gun and signed up for a card and then find out later because prices are supposed to be going down that you could have gotten a better deal somewhere else. Are you going to allow that period where you can sign up for one and then change your mind?

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SECRETARY THOMPSON: No. We are going to do everything we possibly can. And that's why we are setting up so much as far as an educational program. We got Social Security sending out letters, we are sending out letters to all 42 million individuals under Medicare. We got 1-800-M-E-D-I-C-A-R-E, we have our webpage, we got our SHIP programs. So we are doubling the money we are spending. We are going from a little over 11 million dollars to almost 22 million dollars this year, and next year it will be 31 million dollars actually going to all the senior centers across America to invite seniors in to get this information.

We are going to have to, you know, play by the rules, and that's what it is. But we are going to do everything we possibly can to get that senior the best deal possible, give that senior the most up-to-date information. That's why we are telling seniors window shop for a while because this is going to be the first week. You know, we posted the prices this week. So the drug card companies are going to look at the prices that their competition has, and they are going to go back to the wholesalers and to the pharmaceutical companies and say, you gave a better deal to Card X, I want the same deal. And you are going to see, I think, a trending down of the prices come next week. That's why we are encouraging seniors, window shop.

And as Congressman Kingston said, his father is typical

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of the seniors that I know. They are the individuals that are very price conscious. They are going to be like Neil, they are going to find the best deal for themselves, and Neil's daughter is going to look at the best deal. They are going to call us up a couple times, maybe three or four times to get the best deal.

Congressman, would you like to respond to that about your father?

CONGRESSMAN KINGSTON: I do want to emphasize that what we have found and I have done a tremendous number of town hall meetings as have my colleagues, but the biggest advocate for a senior is often somebody like Neil's daughter or somebody who is there all the time that kind of listens to what they hear from a member of Congress or what they see on TV and then they get verification by talking to each other. And I believe that is why this is so exciting. You got this education period, but then the market will really be kicking in as seniors start talking one to each other to find out who has got the absolute best deal.

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER 2: Mr. Secretary, a number of the card makers say that the information is inaccurate on the website. What is the status of that, and how can seniors be making these choices if the prices posted are not accurate?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Well first off, the information

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is accurate. We have to guarantee, we have to guarantee that the senior is going to get that price when she or he walks into the drug store. So we are going to put on our webpage what the drug card company says is the highest amount so that we can guarantee that that senior gets that much of a savings. Now it could be lower, and one of the problems is is that some drug card companies are putting in different prices for different amounts.

So if you are purchasing 100 pills from the wholesaler and then another pharmacist is purchasing 500 pills, the difference, the volume amount between a 100-pill bottle versus a 500-pill versus one of our mail order companies that buys it in 5,000 pill lots is going to be different. But we want to make sure that that senior goes in and gets that price. So we are going to put the highest price down there to guarantee it. Now some of the drug card companies say that isn't our lowest price, no it isn't. It's what they submitted, but what we want to make sure is that that senior is going to get at least that amount.

Now they may go to another drug store to get a lower amount, so much the better. We want the seniors to get it. But that's the difference; it's the different volume amounts that are put on the application on the drug card companies. We have put the highest amount on because that is the one that we can guarantee Neil and Mabel and Sarah are going to be able to

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receive, okay.

FEMALE SPEAKER 2: So they are accurate [inaudible], your numbers are accurate?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Our numbers are accurate. Now they are going to be changing. Now you can have, you know, the drug card company could have made a mistake in transposing the number; we could have possibly had a mistake. We will correct that, but overall, our numbers are correct, and that's the difference. The difference is based upon volume amounts that the drug cards have put in. Okay. Yes, sir.

MALE SPEAKER 2: Following on that question, a senior goes to the Medicare site for a particular card and sees one price. They go down to the card sponsor site which are not activated and see a different price. What do you advise that senior to do before making a decision?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Well I would tell that senior to call us up.

MALE SPEAKER 2: Why should they take Medicare's higher price for instance over the lower price?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Well they shouldn't, Mark, that's why I am telling them to call us. We will give them the best deal; we will give them the information. Call us, 1-800-M-E-D-I-C-A-R-E. That's why we tripled the number of receivers and operator to make sure we give that senior the most up-to-date information we have and the most correct information.

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MALE SPEAKER 2: How do you advise a senior to reconcile the discrepancies between the prices on your sites and the prices on the card sponsor sites?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Well, we can reconcile it just like I said. The drug card company can say, you know, that they are going to have that drug, the lowest amount; if they purchase a 5,000-pill bottle versus a 100-pill bottle. But what we are going to tell the senior exactly what is in the application with the up-to-date information. I would strongly encourage them to call us, Mark. That's why we set it up and made it so consumer friendly to all the seniors. We want them to have the best information. We don't want a senior, Mark, we don't want a senior to walk into a drug store that only has a 100-pill bottle and say, well, the drug card company says they are actually selling it when they are basing their figure on a 5,000-pill bottle from a wholesaler. We want to make sure that that senior is going to get that price or lower. Do you follow me? Okay. Yes?

FEMALE SPEAKER 3: Mr. Secretary, you're saying that people should window shop because prices may go down next Monday or possibly the Monday after. When should they stop window shopping and start enrolling?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: I can't give them an exact date. I would say that - I would encourage them to window shop for the first two weeks, and I think that is going to shake out a

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lot. This is going to be - I think this week is going to be a really telling week because this is the week that the drug card companies are going to start advertising, number one. Number two, they are going to be able to compare themselves. The drug card companies are also window shopping, and they are going to be window shopping with each of the other competitors they have for that particular community. And they are going to want to be able to get market share because that's what's going to allow them to do a better job and stay in the business and be able to provide the best services.

So they want market share and they are going to be very, very cognoscente of what other people are charging. So they are going to be looking at that and being able to find ways in order to reduce their prices for the seniors. So I would say, let's window shop for two weeks. Drug card companies are going to window shop, and I think next Monday is going to be another really telling story for you as a reporter, and the seniors who are going to enroll. Yes, Robert.

MALE SPEAKER 3: Some of the initial analysis suggests that you can get similar prices as the drug discount cards with online pharmacies like www.drugstore.com, is that conceivable to you?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: To sell what?

MALE SPEAKER 3: Some of the initial analyses have suggested that you can get just as good a price from online

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pharmacies without using the discount card.

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Well, Robert, what we have - there is going to be some incidences, some examples, but we also have drug cards that we have on our webpages that beat those, and we are going to be telling the senior that comes in exactly that. That if they want to go to a mail order card, a mail order purchaser that we are going to have cards that beat what you have listed and what Congressman Waxman had on his comparison.

When you compare apples to apples - now you can compare apples to oranges, you can compare a website with a drug store in Topeka, Kansas, and you may be able to beat them. But we'll have webpages - drug cards on our webpage that beat what's on the list, do you follow me? So when you compare apples with apples we are going to have a savings for the senior. Not in every category, but we'll have a card that hits every category that is lower. Okay.

FEMALE SPEAKER 4: You said the price differentials depending on the amount; are seniors going to be able to compare apples to apples?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Maybe not a senior that doesn't have a webpage, but that's why we got 1-800-M-E-D-I-C-A-R-E, and that's why we have our SHIP programs that we are going to spend close to 22 million dollars this year, and 31 million dollars next year to go out into senior centers. That's why we

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are - we are also negotiating with many different groups, elderly groups that are actually going to go out into the homes of seniors and sit down with that senior and talk to that senior about how to enroll and what's the best program for that senior.

There is going to be so much information. There has never been a program with so much information, so much help for our seniors, and I like it. And I wanted it, I insisted upon it, Medicare insisted upon it, and the Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services, several of those employees are here, they have just done a wonderful job of getting this information. We got great people out there that are doing a great job, and we are going to give the seniors the best service possible. Yes.

FEMALE SPEAKER 5: Mr. Secretary, there seems to be a lot of confusion remaining among low-income seniors who are enrolled in state pharmacy assistance programs that are not benefits per say, as to whether they are going to be able to access these cards. What are you doing to clear up the confusion for that population?

SECRETARY THOMPSON: Well we are working with the states. We are going to also - in some states want us to have automatic enrollment, we are going to be able to do that. We are going to clear all this up, you know, we are not going to be able to answer every problem today but every problem we will be able to answer eventually. And if there is a problem we

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can't answer right now, we will get the answer; we will work it out and get it back to that senior, back to the press as soon as we can.

But right now, there is some confusion there at the state levels. We are going to allow some of those states to have self-enrollment or automatic enrollment, we are going to be doing some other things to benefit those states. I am confident we will have all those problems worked out very quickly.

I thank you. Now we are going to go next door, we are going to have a demonstration where we got some computers set up, some telephones set up. Our computers are set up actually to go right into our webpage out at CMS and we are going to allow the TV's to get some coverage of seniors actually working the webpages, the computers, as well as the telephones. Thank you very much all of you for coming. [Applause]

[END RECORDING]