

## Allen: GOP's prescription plan relies too heavily on insurers

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WASHINGTON — A proposal that House Republicans have developed for a prescription-drug benefit under Medicare won't work, Maine Rep. Tom Allen, a Democrat, said Wednesday.

The goal of the Republican plan is to have private insurers provide a benefit overseen by Medicare. House Ways and Means Committee Chairman Bill Thomas, R-Calif., said tentative details aim for a monthly premium of \$35 to \$40, with a \$250 deductible, with all costs above \$5,000 covered.

Seniors earning less than 150 percent of the federal poverty level would get government assistance with their payments.

Thomas said the goal is for the government to pay 80 percent of the costs.

But Democrats say the plan relies on private insurance companies that can't be counted on to provide the service.

Allen said 85 percent of senior citizens need prescriptions, which is too large a portion for an insurance company to make money in a state like Maine by offering a benefit.

"The Republican plan is misguided in relying on the private insurance market to essentially provide something that is designed to look like a benefit," Allen said. "I don't think that's realistic."

Allen and Rep. John Baldacci, D-Maine, sponsored legislation to limit Medicare drug costs to the prices paid in other industrial countries, which average 40 percent less than in the United States.

Sens. Olympia Snowe and Susan Collins, both R-Maine, are advocating a drug benefit of at least \$300 billion over the next decade, with details still under negotiation.