

OUR VIEW

Spare Tookie

California Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger is having a George Bush moment. Like the man he helped put in the White House, the Governor is experiencing turbulent times on the throne. Bush is catching it from all sides—lagging approval ratings; growing public discontent with the war in Iraq; indictments of GOP kingmakers (Tom DeLay and I. Lewis Libby); hiccups within his own party (not everyone calling for withdrawal from Iraq is a Democrat); fallout from the response to Hurricane Katrina.

Ditto Schwarzenegger. Swept into office on the strength of his character, combined with a populist message and voters weary of California's tumble under Gray Davis, Schwarzenegger was supposed to don his cape and save the day. Instead, he's rankled politicians on both sides of the aisle and saw his Nov. 8 special election go down in a hail of flames. Hard as it may be to fathom, but Schwarzenegger could stem some of the hemorrhaging by doing something decidedly un-Republican: sparing a life. More correctly, the life of Stanley "Tookie" Williams.

Williams has become pseudo-celebrity, more famous than he is notorious. Tookie co-founded the Crips decades ago in South Central Los Angeles. The group initially served to protect their neighborhoods from marauding toughs. The introduction of drugs, firearms and a deadlier form of territorialism conspired to explode the gang culture, creating a monster that Tookie never could've envisioned, much less controlled.

Tookie has been imprisoned since 1981, convicted of killing four people in two Los Angeles robberies, for which he sits on death row today. His execution is scheduled for Dec. 13.

Arnold, here's where you should step in and spare Tookie. Since his incarceration, Tookie turned his life around, becoming a more powerful force for change than he was for destruction. He's written books, "Blue Rage, Black Redemption" and "Children and Gangs," which have been read and used around the world. Williams has also earned five Nobel Peace Prize nominations. Children from as far away as Milan, Italy, are participating in creating 300,000 postcards to send to Schwarzenegger's office asking for clemency for Tookie. Since Nov. 16, there have been a series of rallies throughout California. Death penalty abolitionists and gang interventionists have made Tookie their cause celebre.

Then there's the evidence of the crime itself.

"His trial is a prime example of the kind of injustice that Black men receive in this society. He is innocent. There is no physical evidence linking him to the crimes that he was convicted of," Danielle Heck, co-chair of the Campaign to End the Death Penalty's L.A. branch, told the *Final Call*. "The only evidence that a racist court in Torrance had to look at was testimony by jailhouse informants who were given the case file to look over before they testified against him. As a result, their charges were reduced."

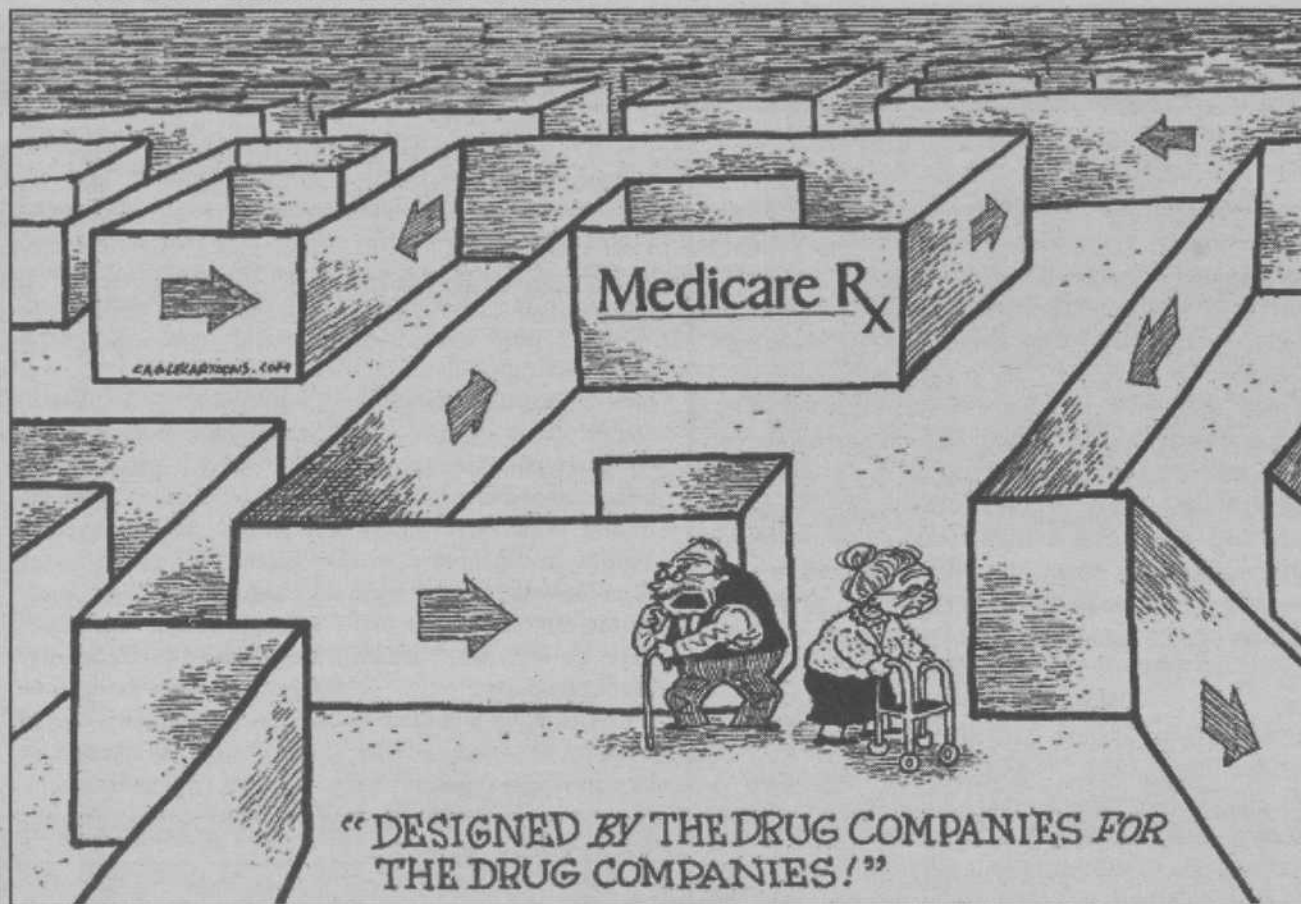
But we know, Arnold, you're worried about being re-elected. As columnist Earl Ofari Hutchinson notes in a recent column, granting clemency didn't hurt governors in Virginia or Texas, two execution-happy states. "The few times that governors have bucked the death penalty and spared a life, it has not been the political kiss of death for them. It won't be for Schwarzenegger either."

Happy Holidays

Thanksgiving is once again upon us. And it is truly a time to give thanks. But in doing so, we should first count our blessings then, in addition to giving thanks, we should give of ourselves.

As Hurricanes Katrina and Rita crystallized so clearly—and as many of us know all too well—poverty and despair aren't cyclical things. Disaster or no, these twin plagues on society are ever present.

So as you celebrate your families, loved ones, friends and associates this holiday season, remember to express thanks for your blessings, and then go out and be a blessing unto others. Happy holidays everyone.



Deciphering the Medicare drug plan

By Dora LaGrande
Sentinel-Voice

For the past two weeks, there has been much discussion among senior citizens regarding the Medicare Drug Prescription Plan that took effect on November 15. I am going to highlight some benefits and, hopefully, clear up some of the confusion by giving a few tips to help in the selection process.

For the first time ever, everyone with Medicare, regardless of income, health status, or type of prescription drug usage will have access to prescription drug coverage. This new elective coverage is a vital addition to Medicare and will help people save money and live better, healthier lives. More importantly, it will extend the promise of modern drug treatment to everyone with Medicare.

First of all, clearly understand that there is no need for anyone to rush to make a plan selection.

Even though the enrollment date began last week, the deadline to enroll is May 15, so seniors have up until then to decide whether or not they want to enroll. In the meantime, there is time to analyze the information and determine whether there are benefits for you or your household.

There are many plans available under the program, and in some states, there are dozens. While there are in excess of 17 plans in Nevada, there is no need to be intimidated. Here are some basics to help in understanding the process, and I recommend



ON THE RECORD

By Dora LaGrande

two online resources to help seniors select the best Medicare prescription drug coverage plan(s).

The key to choosing a plan is to choose one that reflects what you want in terms of three factors: cost, coverage and convenience.

- Cost is what you pay for the coverage, including premiums, deductibles and payments for your drugs.

- Coverage is what benefits are being provided by the plan, which drugs are covered and the rules for getting those drugs.

- Convenience is which pharmacies are part of the plan and whether the plan has a mail-order option.

Participation in the plan, called Part D, is optional for most. For some seniors, the benefits will take effect automatically. The decision to acquire this coverage depends on how you pay for your drugs currently and how you get your Medicare coverage. Benefits from the new program depend on your own circumstances.

Most people pay for drugs and get their Medicare in one of five ways:

If you have the original Medicare-only plan or original Medicare plus Medigap (supplement) policy, but without drug coverage, the new Medicare drug coverage will cover half of the costs for

your prescriptions.

If you have the original Medicare and Medigap (supplemental coverage) with drug benefits, the new Medicare coverage will provide a more comprehensive coverage at lower cost.

If you have retiree or union coverage, you can continue to get it along with gaining new economic benefits from Medicare Part D.

If you have a Medicare Advantage Plan (an HMO or a PPO) or other medical health plan, it already includes drug coverage and other extra benefits. The new plan might not hold as many or any advantages for seniors in this group.

If you have dual coverage from Medicare with Medicaid drug coverage, you will automatically get comprehensive prescription drug coverage from Medicare Part

D, starting on January 1.

Now, understanding those basics, the plan comparison process is the next step. The federal government has two resources that seniors can access from a computer with Internet access.

For those who don't know how to or cannot access the online tools by computer, they should really make a concerted attempt to have a daughter, son, granddaughter or grandson, neighbor or friend access the information for them. Both of these tools can prove to be invaluable in the search for the right plan and both are on the Medicare main website.

One of the online tools is called Landscape of Local Plans. You can find Medicare prescription drug plans by state or Medicare advantage plans with prescription drug coverage by county.

You can see the plans in your area that offer drug coverage, and get information to help you find these that meet your needs based on the three factors — cost coverage and convenience.

(See LaGrande, Page 11)

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