

AARP Supports Freshman Senators' Amendments to Lower Health Care Costs

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WASHINGTON— Today, a group of eleven freshmen U.S. Senators introduced several amendments to the health care legislation being considered in the Senate. AARP Executive Vice President Nancy LeaMond gave brief remarks during today's introduction. Excerpts from LeaMond's remarks follow:

"On behalf of our nearly 40 million members, AARP is pleased with this cost containment and health care delivery reform amendment to the Senate health care reform legislation. We applaud these senators for their leadership and willingness to work together to improve the Senate bill.

"This amendment package contains important innovations that will help fix our broken health care system and move it into the 21st century.

"In particular, AARP supports changes to broaden the scope of the Independent Medicare Advisory Board. A special thanks goes to Sen. Mark Udall of Colorado, for his leadership in crafting provisions to broaden the scope of the Medicare board.

"Our members understand better than most the importance of protecting Medicare. We also understand that skyrocketing costs throughout the health care system threaten Medicare and risk the health security for the tens of millions of Americans for whom Medicare is literally a lifeline.

"AARP agrees with many of the Independent Medicare Advisory Board's goals—such as extending Medicare solvency, slowing cost-growth, and improving quality. However, any attempt to set spending targets in Medicare alone would be shortsighted and dangerous for the 45 million people who rely on it. We strongly support the changes made by Majority Leader Reid permitting the Board to act only if Medicare spending rises faster than overall health spending. It is not fair to hold Medicare to a different standard than the economy at large.

"Looking at Medicare in isolation would also fail to address the underlying threats to the sustainability of our entire health care system. The disease we must cure is rising health care costs; Medicare is merely a symptom of that illness.

“It is critical that any legislation strengthens Medicare and does not weaken it. These amendments help make sure that as we fix our troubled health care system that Medicare remains a vibrant option for the millions who rely on it.

“Therefore, the Board’s scope must be expanded to look at total health spending so we can make healthcare affordable for all Americans.

“In addition, this package has a number of other provisions that could help AARP members and all older Americans, and protect Medicare, including:

- * Combating fraud and abuse in more sophisticated ways;
- * Beginning to lay the groundwork so we can more closely tie provider payments to quality not quantity; and
- * Helping support doctors and other health care providers to reduce disparities.

“Ultimately, we need to shift our entire health care system from one that decides who we can see, for which procedures, and for how much money - to one that helps us get and stay healthy.”

The eleven freshmen who introduced today’s package of amendments are Sens. Mark Begich (AK), Michael Bennet (CO), Roland Burris (IL), Kay Hagan (NC), Ted Kaufman (DE), Paul Kirk (MA), Jeff Merkley (OR), Jeanne Shaheen (NH), Mark Udall (CO), Tom Udall (NM) and Mark Warner (VA).

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