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Floor Statement of U.S. Senator Chuck Grassley of Iowa  
Ranking Member of the Committee on Finance  
Cloture on the motion to proceed to S.3101, the Medicare bill  
Thursday, June 12, 2008

Mr. President, the vote we are going to take later today is an important one. The outcome will determine whether we begin working together again on a bill the President will sign. For the sake of the 40 million Medicare beneficiaries, I urge my colleagues to defeat the cloture motion today. Then we can get to work on a bipartisan basis and write a bill that can be signed into law.

Mr. President, this afternoon, the Senate will be voting to move forward on a bill that would be vetoed if it passed. That is a pointless exercise if there ever was one. What's worse, the reality is that the bill is not even really ready for serious consideration. It is incomplete. It was introduced riddled with blanks and brackets. It won't become law. It cuts oxygen. It cuts power wheel chairs. It threatens future physician updates. It is a partisan bill that delays bipartisan consideration of a Medicare bill.

And while the Senate wastes time with this bill, millions of taxpayer dollars in administrative costs are also going to be wasted. CMS has to program their systems to not have the physician pay cut go into effect on July 1. But they can only do that if Congress can pass a bill that can be signed into law. Voting for this bill is the same as asking for the physician pay cut to go into effect. And if it does, then CMS has to potentially hold millions of claims to reprocess them later. That costs millions and millions of dollars a week.

If the Senate votes for cloture on this bill today, we may as well be taking a match to millions of taxpayer dollars. We had been working on a bipartisan process that could get us a bill that could be signed into law, but for some reason, the majority got up and walked away from the table. That was at the end of May. With all due respect to my friends on the other side of the aisle, in the three weeks since, they have produced a bill that, for all the rhetoric we'll be hearing today, isn't worth the paper it's printed on. It won't become law - it will be vetoed.

Meanwhile, doctors in this country are looking at the calendar wondering what their payments will be after June 30th and wondering whether they can still afford to see Medicare patients. They are wondering if they have enough cash reserves if Congress doesn't get its act

together.

Mr President, I want to say something to the doctors back home who are listening to this debate. I know your insider Washington lobbyists are telling you that supporting cloture is the best way to prevent the physician pay cut from going into effect on July 1st. But they are giving you bad advice. It's a good thing they aren't giving the advice to real patients like you do if this is the kind of judgment that they would use. The fact is a vote in support of cloture is the absolute worst thing that could happen if you want the physician payment update addressed quickly.

If 60 Senators support cloture, we'll move to pass a bill out of the Senate. Of course that will be a bill that will get vetoed. Then the Senate will sit down with the House on a partisan basis and produce a compromise that has even more spending, is even more liberal and more certain to be vetoed. Then it will be voted on in the House and come back here for a vote. Then finally, it will go to the President where it will get vetoed. Then we will have a veto override vote that will certainly fail. And then, and only then, will we sit down on a bipartisan basis to write a bill that can become law.

Given how quickly things move around here that should be at about Thanksgiving. If cloture fails, I'm ready to roll up my sleeves and go to work tonight, June 12th. So to all the doctors listening to this back home, to folks who pay dues to groups like the American Medical Association and the American College of Physicians, hear me when I say, the people telling you that supporting cloture is the way to get the physician payment update done fastest don't deserve the jobs they hold.

Mr. President, the solution is a simple one. We need to defeat the cloture motion today and get back to bipartisan work to protect Medicare for America's seniors and the providers who serve them. Mr. President, yesterday Senator McConnell and I introduced a bill, S.3118, to address the problems we face in Medicare. The Democrats are blocking our bill from getting a vote today.

It's too bad, because it is a very good bill. I spoke of some of the provisions of the bill earlier this afternoon. It is a bill that clearly serves Medicare beneficiaries. Our bill reduces medication errors with stronger e-prescribing provisions. This will help ensure that our seniors' health care is not compromised by duplicative, dangerous or incompatible prescriptions. Our bill helps patients who have had a heart attack with cardiac and pulmonary rehab. Our bill insures that seniors who need access to outpatient therapy services will continue to receive the therapy they need.

I am very pleased that our bill pays a tribute to our beloved, departed colleague, Senator Craig Thomas by including a number of provisions that protect access for beneficiaries in rural America. Specifically, our bill would accomplish this by addressing inequitable disparities in Medicare reimbursements between rural and urban providers and helps ensure these providers are able to keep their doors open. By continuing to fund two important and successful programs to combat diabetes, our bill helps people with diabetes. Finally, our bill includes a number of extensions to help low income seniors and families.

Mr. President, as we close this debate, I think the vote is a very simple one. The President will sign a bill that preserves Medicare for America's seniors and the providers who serve them. The President will sign a bill that will provide increases in payments for rural health care in America. The President will even sign a bill that reduces payments to Medicare Advantage. The President will also sign a bill promotes value-based purchasing, electronic prescribing, and electronic health records. The President will sign a bill that doesn't require cuts in oxygen payments or payments for power wheel chairs.

Unfortunately, the bill we are voting here and now to move forward on is not that bill. People back home often don't understand votes on procedural motions like this one. But this one is easy. Voting for this bill is a step backwards. It's not a step forward. It won't become law.

Mr. President, I ask my colleagues to vote 'no' on the cloture motion so we can get to work on a bill the President will sign. Let's set aside the partisan games and get to work protecting Medicare for America's seniors.