



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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For Immediate Release

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Grassley Blasts Democratic Leaders' Town Meeting Rhetoric on Medicare Drug Benefit

WASHINGTON – Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Committee on Finance, today told the Democratic Senate and House leaders that their effort to discredit the Medicare prescription drug benefit through town meetings nationwide suggests inaccurately that no one is benefiting from the new drug benefit, and that such negative rhetoric could scare beneficiaries away from getting much-needed prescription drug coverage.

The text of Grassley's letter follows.

March 1, 2006

The Honorable Harry Reid
Democratic Leader
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Democratic Leader
United States House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Democratic Leader Reid and Democratic Leader Pelosi:

Since Democratic Members of Congress have taken many opportunities to share their experiences after holding town hall meetings on the Medicare prescription drug benefit, I thought that I would do the same. I also want to make sure that you are aware of important information on enrollment in the Medicare prescription drug benefit.

Last week, I visited with Iowans in fifteen counties across my state. I heard from beneficiaries who have encountered some problems in the early days of the benefit. In addition, I heard from Iowa beneficiaries and pharmacists who said that the situation was improving and that the transition was not as difficult as anticipated. I heard from enrollment counselors in Iowa that many beneficiaries are deciding not to enroll simply because of a steady stream for two years of constant negative rhetoric about the benefit. I also have heard from many beneficiaries who found enrolling to be a

straightforward process and who are extremely satisfied with the new prescription drug benefit.

I am troubled by the outward lack of balance in reports on town hall meetings held by Democrats. These reports seemingly suggest that no one has benefited from the new prescription drug benefit. We all know that simply is not the case. Millions of prescriptions have been filled without incident since January 1. Enrollment information from February shows strong growth in stand-alone prescription drug plans, which is the best gauge of voluntary enrollment. In Iowa, enrollment in stand-alone prescription drug plans increased by seventy-one percent from January to February. Sixteen states, including Nevada (52 percent) and California (51 percent) had enrollment growth rates that exceeded fifty percent. Another nine states experienced enrollment growth between forty percent and forty-seven percent.

I am certainly not suggesting that we shy away from discussing the difficulties experienced by some beneficiaries. We need to discuss these issues, but most importantly, we need to make sure these problems are fixed. The approach taken by the Democratic Leadership has the potential for serious negative consequences for beneficiaries, who may forego enrolling in the prescription drug benefit altogether. I am perplexed that the Democratic Leadership has chosen to sacrifice beneficiaries' well-being and health for its own political gain and again implore the Democratic Leadership to reconsider its irresponsible approach.

Sincerely,

Charles E. Grassley
Chairman