



United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

May 11, 2006

The President
The White House Office
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Across the country, over 40 million Medicare beneficiaries have been presented with the choice of signing up for the Medicare prescription drug program. Unfortunately, many seniors and individuals with disabilities are understandably concerned and confused about the new benefit.

Beneficiaries face a number of prescription drug plan options, and choosing the right plan can be a challenge. Each of the options differs in terms of premiums, cost-sharing requirements, drugs covered and pharmacy access. Sorting through these plans has proven to be difficult and time consuming for many beneficiaries. Further complicating matters, the Medicare drug program has experienced a variety of implementation problems that have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable beneficiaries.

Yet, beneficiaries who do not act by the May 15, 2006, deadline and who enroll at a later date will face a financial penalty. Seniors who choose a plan after May 15, 2006, will be penalized by a one percent increase in their premium for each month they delay their choice.

We are writing to request that you direct Secretary Leavitt to extend the enrollment deadline through the end of the year, and eliminate the financial penalty during this period.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has estimated that an additional 1.1 million beneficiaries would sign up for the Medicare prescription drug program during this year if the May 15th deadline was extended. In addition, they calculate that eliminating the penalty for this year would ultimately lower premiums for 7.5 million beneficiaries.

Since Congress has not yet passed legislation expanding the existing six-month open enrollment period, we urge you to take action. The stakes here are too high to deny seniors the time and resources they need to make an informed decision.

Secretary Leavitt has already extended the enrollment deadline for some low-income beneficiaries and hurricane Katrina evacuees. We believe the Secretary has the legal authority to provide the same benefit to all Medicare beneficiaries.

We all share the goal of ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries have sufficient time and assistance to make a wise decision regarding prescription drug coverage. We respectfully urge you to announce your intention to delay both the enrollment deadline and penalty as soon as possible.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson

Susan Collins

Allen DeBevoise

Mike DeLoe

Robert Menendez

Mary Jo White

Maria Cantwell

Eric Boehlert

Hillary Rodham Clinton

John F. Kerry

Carl Levin

Mark Dayton

Frank R. Lautenberg

Byron G. Dorgan

Herb Kohl

Jeanne Klein

Paul S. Sarbanes

Robert C. Byrd

Chuck Schumer

Jain H. Pata

Debbie Stabenow

Harry Reid

Robert A. Menendez

Manuel B. Fajardo

Jay Byrnes

Tom Carper

Mark Boyer

Th. Wey

Blanche R. Lincoln

Jim Jeffords

Patrick Leahy

Patty Murray

Joe Biden

Ed Kennedy

Jack Rubin

Barbara Boxer

Joe Lieber

Ken Salazar

Tom Harkin

Jack Reed

Murray

E. Benjamin Johnson

Barack Obama

Jeff Blaker

Kent Larned

James Johnson

Chris Ortol
