



Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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Statement of U.S. Senator Max Baucus Tentative Agreement on Medicare Prescription Drug Legislation

"I am pleased that we have reached a tentative agreement in principle on a Medicare prescription drug benefit. This is a historic opportunity and we must not let it pass us by. We have \$400 billion on the table today and our seniors deserve to see results.

While this is not a perfect bill, it is a good bill and it will accomplish our goal of providing our nation's seniors with a prescription drug benefit.

Of course, while I am here today to express support for the agreement we're announcing, I need to highlight the fact that any final deal is still subject to review and sign-off on the details and language itself.

But I believe we have an agreement in principle today that can pass both houses. And I'm going to work to see that it passes by a strong majority. The Senate passed its bill with 76 votes. I'm hopeful to achieve similar results when we vote on the conference report.

And I believe we'll get those votes because we have an agreement in front of us that will work for our seniors and disabled. An agreement that will help them live longer, and live better.

I am also very pleased that we have an agreement that will work for both rural and urban seniors. As a Senator from the rural state of Montana, it was my top priority to see that this bill protects access to quality, affordable health care for all seniors across the nation.

These months of negotiations have resulted in an agreement that is the true definition of "compromise." A little give, a little take.

As part of that compromise, we have included a pilot program to test a "premium support" program in Medicare. While it is not my personal preference to include this controversial provision, I disagree those who allege that this demonstration will undermine traditional Medicare.

Over 38 years ago, Lyndon Johnson made a promise when he signed Medicare into law:

“No longer will illness crush and destroy the savings [seniors] have so carefully put away over a lifetime...no longer will young families see their own incomes, and their own hopes, eaten away simply because they are carrying out their deep moral obligations to their parents.”

President Johnson was speaking of the high costs of hospital and doctor visits for the uninsured elderly. Today, his words ring just as true about the high costs of prescription drugs.

In closing, let me commend Chairman Thomas and Chairman Grassley, who have led the way throughout the Medicare Conference Committee. They have worked hard to achieve consensus on many important and difficult issues in this bill. Their job has not been easy. While Chairman Grassley is not able to be here today, he asked me to pass on his support for this agreement.

As I have said many times throughout the conference, it has been my hope and objective as a conferee that our negotiations would produce a bill that passes with a solid, bipartisan vote.

After all, that's how Medicare itself passed 38 years ago: 70 to 24 in the Senate, and 307 to 116 in the House.

In the final analysis, our constituents sent us here to work together, to produce solid legislation. And that's what we've done. I urge my colleagues to keep an open mind as we work through the details of this tentative agreement.

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