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Grassley Praises President's Action on Medicare, Prescription Drugs

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Chuck Grassley, a leader of the Committee on Finance, today praised President Bush's development of proposals to help older Americans afford prescription drugs and principles to improve the antiquated Medicare program.

"A rolling stone gathers no moss," Grassley said. "Right now, the stone to improve Medicare is rolling along and picking up momentum. Congress and the President are working hard on Medicare. We have the same interests in mind to pass legislation that adds a meaningful drug benefit and makes much-needed improvements to Medicare this year."

Grassley joined President Bush at the White House this morning for an announcement of the President's proposals for improving Medicare, a two pronged-approach to provide affordable drug coverage and update the out-of-date Medicare program, as well as help older Americans immediately get prescription medications at a lower price.

Grassley said the President's action complements the ongoing work in Congress to enact Medicare legislation this year. Grassley said, "I applaud the President for his efforts this morning. He recognizes the urgent need to help older Americans get prescription medications at a lower price right now. A universal prescription drug plan passed this year will take a little time to get up and running, but older Americans shouldn't have to wait before getting some relief from high drug costs."

Beginning when he was Finance Committee chairman and continuing as ranking member, Grassley is working with Sen. Max Baucus, now chairman, and his committee colleagues to get a comprehensive Medicare proposal considered and approved by the committee as soon as possible, possibly as early as the end of this month.

Grassley described his own principles for improving Medicare, noting that he and the President share many ideas. Grassley's principles include:

- ▶ Like the President, strengthening, simplifying and improving Medicare.
- ▶ Enacting a bipartisan proposal via the Finance Committee.
- ▶ Adding an affordable prescription drug benefit for all older Americans while ensuring that all of their current Medicare services are guaranteed and protected.

- ▶ Adding improvements to Medicare, including updating benefits, providing real insurance protection against catastrophic illnesses, and ensuring access to the best, most effective medical treatments available.
- ▶ Ensuring that Medicare is on sound financial footing for existing beneficiaries and the millions of baby boomers to come.
- ▶ Fixing the regional payment disparities that shortchange Iowa and many other states with large rural areas.
- ▶ Giving Medicare beneficiaries and providers relief from unnecessarily complex and confusing rules, regulations and paperwork, while still continuing to crack down on fraud, waste and abuse.

“The bottom line is, Medicare needs a legislative check-up,” Grassley said. “We can improve the health care delivery system for older Americans this year. To get the job done, lawmakers will need to set partisanship aside and put good public policy over short-term political gain. The President threw a pitch to Congress today. We need to hit the ball over the fence.”