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Baucus Applauds Senate Passage of Bill to Ensure Seniors, Military Families Continue Access to High-Quality Doctors

Finance Leaders' Bill Would Ensure Doctors Can Continue Seeing Medicare, Tricare Patients

Washington, DC – Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-Mont.) today applauded Senate passage of a bill to ensure seniors and military families will be able to continue seeing their doctors. The Physician Payment and Therapy Relief Act of 2010 was introduced by Baucus and Ranking Member Chuck Grassley (R-Iowa) as part of an effort to provide both a short-term and longer-term solution to pay for the Medicare Physician Payment Formula. The bill would ensure Medicare and Tricare, the health care program for active-duty service members, National Guard and Reserve members, retirees and their families, will continue to pay physicians who participate in those programs at current levels. The bill would avoid a statutory cut in those payments that would otherwise go into effect on December 1.

“Seniors and military families can rest assured that they will continue to have access to the doctors, treatments and medications they need,” said Baucus. **“Once signed into law by the President, it will mean that seniors and military families are spared the threat of a lapse in care. The next step is moving onto finding a yearlong extension before this fix runs out.”**

The legislation passed today was the first in a two-part agreement that Baucus and Grassley reached to ensure patients would have more certainty about their care and physicians would have more certainty about their payments. The bill would provide a month-long extension of the current levels of the Medicare payment formula. This extension would be paid for using the Medicare savings from a new Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) policy that reduces payments for multiple therapy services provided to patients in one day. However, this proposal would also provide relief to therapists by shrinking that reduction from 25 percent to 20 percent. The legislation, The Physician Payment and Therapy Relief Act of 2010, would save \$1 billion, which would then be used to pay for the Medicare payment formula.

Baucus and Grassley also agreed they would together pursue a year-long fix to the formula that could be enacted before the month-long patch expires. The Finance leaders said today that they are working together to secure a mutually agreeable way to pay for the year-long cost of the physician formula as well as other extenders, and they felt confident they would find such a solution.

The Finance Committee has jurisdiction over the Medicare program and the physician payment formula, which is tied to payment levels for the Tricare program. The legislation must now be passed by the House and signed into law by the President.

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