



Floor Statement of Sen. Chuck Grassley  
Support for McCain Motion to Commit on Medicare Advantage  
Monday, Dec. 7, 2009

I've spent the past 28 years in Congress working to make sure rural Iowans have access to same quality of health care as people living in more urban areas. During the Medicare Modernization Act, I fought to make sure that seniors living in rural areas would have the same choices as seniors living in Miami or New York City or Los Angeles. And today, that is the case. Seniors in every county in Iowa have the choice between traditional Medicare and a Medicare Advantage plan. That's a big improvement, since prior to the Medicare Modernization Act not all Iowans had that choice.

But there are still inequities. Because Iowa providers offer higher-quality care, that leads to less utilization. Iowans get approximately 1,500 dollars less per year in Medicare Advantage benefits than seniors living in Florida. And under this bill, Iowans will see even less in Medicare Advantage benefits. But it looks like that won't be the case for some lucky Floridians. In just another one of the backroom deals that is needed to get to 60 votes, the Senator from Florida was able to secure a provision in the Finance Committee bill that would make sure seniors in certain Florida counties are able to maintain their current benefits. And I'm not talking about the so-called "guaranteed benefits" that Democrats say they are protecting. The provision secured by the Senator from Florida will also protect the additional or extra benefits for Floridians. In pushing for this amendment, the senior Senator from Florida said, "It would be intolerable to ask senior citizens to give up substantial health benefits they are enjoying under Medicare."

I guess Floridians weren't satisfied with the promises to protect so-called "guaranteed benefits." Seniors in Florida still wanted the lower cost-sharing, wellness programs and vision, hearing and dental benefits that they have come to rely on.

And since the Senator from Pennsylvania has now filed an amendment to help Medicare beneficiaries in Pennsylvania protect their extra benefits, I'm guessing seniors in Pennsylvania must have also picked up on the Democrats' hollow promises to protect "guaranteed benefits."

In fact, the presence of these special deals is proof that this bill is cutting Medicare benefits. It's even proof that some Senators are worried about going back to their constituents and trying to explain the difference between cutting "guaranteed" and "additional" benefits -- and explain why they voted to cut Medicare Advantage benefits by 64 percent.

Why else would these special deals be necessary? So I'm here to ask my colleagues: Why should seniors in Florida or Pennsylvania get to keep their extra benefits while more than 9 million seniors in other parts of the country see an average cut of 64 percent? To quote the Senator from Florida, isn't this also "intolerable"?

My colleagues on the other side of the aisle talk about efficiency and fairness, but they are supporting a bill that maintains the highest Medicare Advantage payments in the country while slashing benefits in higher-quality, rural areas. That doesn't sound very efficient or very fair to me.

Senator McCain's amendment is pretty straightforward. It will just make sure that seniors in every other state in the country – red states and blue states -- get the same deal that Senator Nelson got for Florida. So a vote for the McCain amendment is simply a vote for equity. But a vote against the amendment is a vote in favor of backroom deals that put the interests of a handful of Floridians above 10 million seniors across this country. I urge all my colleagues to support all seniors and vote for the McCain amendment.