

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 4, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to commend you for your opposition to turning Medicare into a voucher system as proposed in the House Republican's FY2012 budget. Since the enactment of Medicare in 1965, America's seniors have no longer lived in fear of losing affordable, comprehensive health insurance when they retire. Unfortunately, some in Congress want to dismantle Medicare in order to help offset the costs of tax cuts for the very wealthiest in our country.

The House Republican budget for Fiscal Year 2012 would end Medicare as we know it and throw seniors into the private market with no more than an insufficient voucher to offset the rising cost of private health insurance. So-called "premium support" – giving seniors a voucher of approximately \$8,000 as proposed by the Republican budget – is a reckless and irresponsible way to address the health care needs of older Americans. And it is an unacceptable means by which to finance tax cuts for those who are earning ten times or more than the retirement income of the average Medicare recipient.

Seniors, who have paid into the system their entire working lives, deserve affordable, secure health coverage upon retirement. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), in the first year of the voucher program, out-of-pocket expenses for seniors would double under the Republican plan to more than \$12,500 annually. For seniors on a fixed income, a doubling of out-of-pocket expenses is simply unaffordable, particularly when the average Social Security benefit is only \$14,000 per year.

The Republican budget proposal would not keep pace with the rate of inflation for health care, meaning seniors would pay ever higher out-of-pocket costs. Under the proposal, the annual increase for the vouchers will fall short of the actual rate of inflation for health care – meaning out-of-pocket expenses for seniors will continue to soar. And to make matters worse, the Republican budget would repeal the only credible means of restraining health care costs – the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

While deficit reduction is essential, balancing the budget by dismantling Medicare is both unfair to hard-working Americans and counterproductive. Seniors who are unable to afford Medicare

or its equivalent will skip preventive services, not take necessary medication, and delay treatment leading to potentially undetected illnesses and more expensive care. If Medicare is turned into a voucher system and the health reform law is dismantled, millions of seniors will be left under- or uninsured. This will add to the burden on our nation's already overwhelmed emergency rooms and result in increased demands on Medicaid as seniors exhaust their life savings.

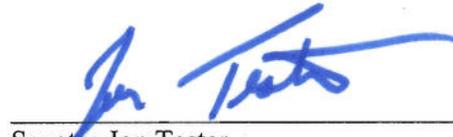
Before the passage of Medicare, only half of America's seniors had health insurance, and most of those with insurance only had coverage for inpatient hospital costs. Additionally, approximately 30 percent of seniors lived below the poverty line before Medicare. Now, only 1.8 percent lack health coverage and less than 9 percent live below the poverty line. We cannot afford to reverse these gains through the ultimate form of rationing health care for seniors: the replacement of Medicare as we know it with insufficient vouchers for private health coverage.

We urge you to protect America's seniors and oppose any attempts to dismantle Medicare.

Sincerely,



Senator Sherrod Brown



Senator Jon Tester



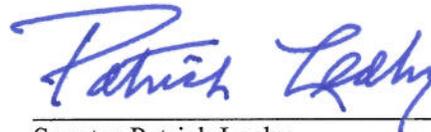
Senator Mark Begich



Senator Jeff Merkley



Senator Jack Reed



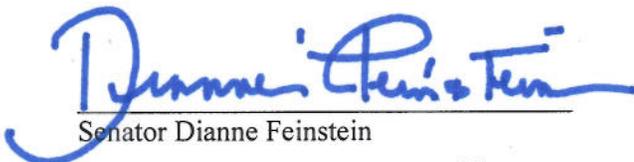
Senator Patrick Leahy



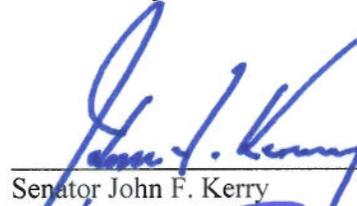
Senator Barbara Mikulski



Senator Benjamin L. Cardin



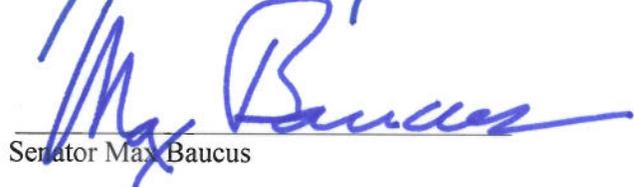
Senator Dianne Feinstein



Senator John F. Kerry



Senator Harry Reid



Senator Max Baucus

Daniel K. Akaka

Senator Daniel Kahikina Akaka

Barbara Boxer

Senator Barbara Boxer

Jeff Bingaman

Senator Jeff Bingaman

Charles E. Schumer

Senator Charles E. Schumer

Bernard Sanders

Senator Bernard Sanders

Mark Udall

Senator Mark Udall

Robert Menendez

Senator Robert Menendez

Debbie Stabenow

Senator Debbie Stabenow

Kent Conrad

Senator Kent Conrad

Ron Wyden

Senator Ron Wyden

Tim Johnson

Senator Tim Johnson

Richard Blumenthal

Senator Richard Blumenthal

Mary Landrieu

Senator Mary Landrieu

Frank R. Lautenberg

Senator Frank R. Lautenberg

Dick Durbin

Senator Dick Durbin

Al Franken

Senator Al Franken

Sheldon Whitehouse

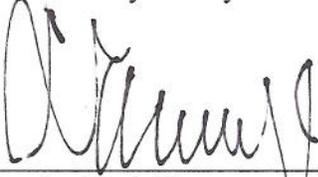
Senator Sheldon Whitehouse

Tom Harkin

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Patty Murray

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Senator Daniel Inouye

Michael Bennet

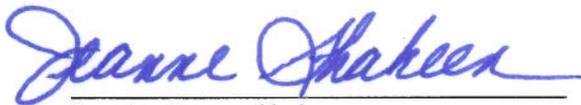
Senator Michael Bennet



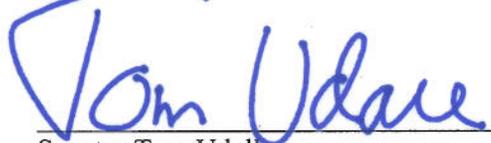
Senator Claire McCaskill

Bob Casey, Jr.

Senator Robert P. Casey Jr.



Senator Jeanne Shaheen



Senator Tom Udall

Ben Nelson

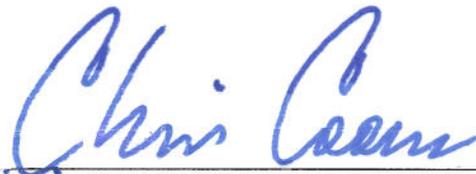
Senator Ben Nelson



Senator Maria Cantwell

Mark Pryor

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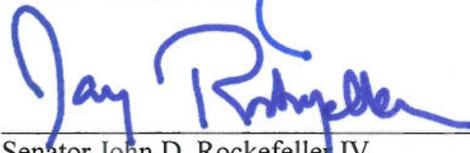
Senator Chris Coons



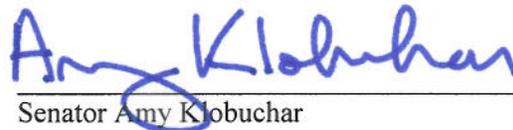
Senator Mark Warner



Senator Joe Manchin



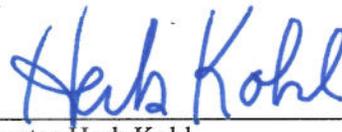
Senator John D. Rockefeller IV



Senator Amy Klobuchar



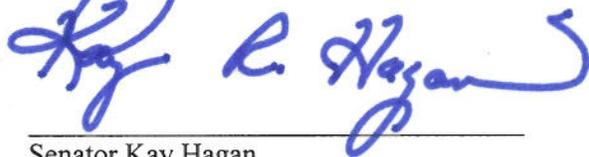
Senator Kirsten Gillibrand



Senator Herb Kohl



Senator Jim Webb



Senator Kay Hagan



Senator Bill Nelson