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SENATE MAJORITY LEADER HARRY REID, NEVADA
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CONTACT: Jim Manley, Reid, (202) 224-2939
Scott Mulhauser, Baucus, (202) 224-4515
Jude McCartin, Bingaman, (202) 224-1804
Matt Thornton, Whitehouse, (202) 228-6293

**BAUCUS, BINGAMAN, WHITEHOUSE JOIN SENIORS ADVOCATE TO HIGHLIGHT
FIRST WAVE OF REBATE CHECKS AND OTHER BENEFITS OF HEALTH REFORM FOR
SENIORS**

Washington, DC— Senate Finance Committee Chair Max Baucus, Senator Jeff Bingaman of the Senate Finance Committee, and Senator Sheldon Whitehouse joined Barbara Easterling of the Alliance for Retired Americans and Stella Johnson, a retired Washington, D.C. school teacher at a press conference today to discuss how America's seniors will benefit from health care reform. As part of the new health insurance reform law, seniors across America will be mailed the first wave of rebate checks to help close the Medicare Part D donut hole today. Almost 3.8 million American seniors are affected by the donut hole every year.

"Beginning today, as a result of health care reform, seniors who hit the donut hole will find a \$250 check in their mailboxes to help them afford their prescription medicines. For seniors in my home state of Montana and across the country, these checks will provide real relief from the rising cost of prescription drugs," Chairman Baucus said. "The health care reform law we worked to pass will also provide seniors in the donut hole with a 50-percent discount next year and continue working to close the donut hole so all seniors have access to the medicines they need. These checks are a real victory for America's seniors and we will continue working to implement all the provisions in health care reform, including those that strengthen Medicare for America's seniors."

"The 'donut hole' was a major flaw in Medicare Part D," said Senator Bingaman. "The new health insurance law will eventually close the gap entirely, but in the meantime these \$250 checks are being sent to help seniors to cover the cost of their life-saving prescriptions."

“Since I ran for the Senate in 2006, I’ve heard countless horror stories about folks affected by the dreaded Medicare Part D doughnut hole,” said Senator Whitehouse. “Far too many seniors are forced to choose between taking their medication and putting food on the table or paying their bills. This is unacceptable, and today marks the first step toward fixing the problem. For Rhode Island seniors who have been hit hard by the long recession, this will be welcome relief.”

“This new law will help Americans of all ages live longer, healthier lives,” said Barbara Easterling. “Many seniors are still unaware of the specific ways this law will benefit them. We must all work together to make sure retirees know about these \$250 rebate checks and all other parts of the new law.”

“The new health reform law will help me, my family, and my friends by phasing out this Medicare donut hole,” said Stella Johnson. “I am delighted that the health care bill recently became law and that the benefits for seniors are already upon us. This new law is phasing out the Medicare prescription drug donut hole. I want to thank the people who stood up for me and every senior in America when they supported the new health reform law.”

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