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SENATE DEMOCRATS JOIN SENIOR ADVOCATES TO DISCUSS HOW HEALTH REFORM SUPPORTS AMERICA'S SENIORS

Washington, DC— Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus, Senate HELP Committee Senior Member Chris Dodd, Senate HELP Committee Chairman Tom Harkin and Senator Robert Menendez joined Bonnie Cramer of the AARP and Dr. Fred Turton of the American College of Physicians at a press conference this morning to discuss how a simple up-or-down vote on adjustments to health reform legislation will help America's seniors. Senate Democrats want to make this good law even better by closing the 'donut hole' to make prescription drugs more affordable for seniors.

"Among the biggest winners from the passage of health reform are seniors in Nevada and across America," said Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid. "The bill that the President signed yesterday cracks down on waste, fraud and abuse in Medicare and stops insurers from charging higher premiums because of age or pre-existing conditions. With the improvements that we're trying to make on this already good legislation, we'll start to completely close the 'donut hole' that raises prescription costs for nearly 60,000 Nevada seniors and millions more nationwide."

Senator Baucus said: "Health care reform is a victory for seniors, in Montana and across the country, and this week, we are working to make that victory even sweeter. The new law provides free preventive care and annual wellness visits in Medicare to keep our seniors healthy, and it improves the financial stability of Medicare for years to come. The law will also cover half of the costs of brand name drugs in the Medicare Part D donut hole, where, before now, millions of seniors were forced to pay the full cost of expensive medicines they needed. This week, we will make this good bill even better by closing the donut hole completely and providing seniors with an extra \$250 when they reach the coverage gap this year."

"Health care reform will bring real and immediate benefits to seniors in Connecticut and across America," said Senator Dodd. "For 547,000 seniors in Connecticut, it means extending the solvency of the Medicare they rely on for their care. It means they'll be able to get free preventive care. And it means finally closing the 'donut hole' that leaves too many seniors – 97,000 each year in Connecticut – stuck paying more than they can afford for the medicine they need."

Senator Harkin said: "It's been a long, hard-fought battle, but the hundred year struggle to provide affordable, quality health care coverage is over. And the unsung heroes of that battle are the doctors, nurses, seniors and advocates who stood up for reform. I am so proud to be here today with Americans who saw through the special interests' distortions and weighed in on the side of truth."

"With a simple up-or-down vote this week, we will have improved on the historic new health insurance law to deliver full prescription drug coverage to seniors, among other important benefits," said Senator Menendez. "Our colleagues on the other side of the aisle want to take that away from seniors, and we are fighting to ensure seniors will be able to keep it."

Bonnie Cramer said: "We're so close today to providing millions of older Americans the security of knowing that they can count on taking the prescription drugs they need without skipping days, splitting pills or missing meals. We need the Senate to now act and pass legislation that includes key priorities of AARP members and all older Americans, including closing the doughnut hole."

"I am so proud to stand with you today as the Senate begins the work of putting the final finishing touches on legislation that preserves and strengthens the security that Medicare provides America's seniors, while extending this core principle to their children and grandchildren," said Dr. Fred Turton.

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