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July 23, 2009

United States Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator:

On behalf of the millions of members and supporters of the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, I am writing to urge you to oppose any effort to transfer Congressional authority to structure the Medicare program to an appointed Commission or entity charged primarily with reducing program spending. We believe such proposals cede to an unelected body responsibilities that rightfully belong to Congress, and could result in a fundamental transformation of the Medicare program and a serious erosion of the benefits relied upon by millions of seniors and the disabled.

Currently, only Congress can change principal aspects of the Medicare benefit, including premiums, deductibles, coinsurance, and covered services. A recent proposal put forward by the Administration, however, would create an Independent Medicare Advisory Council (IMAC) to initiate broad changes to the Medicare program. Under the proposal, if these changes are approved by the President, Congress would have a limited, 30-day time frame to override the entire package, with no opportunity to offer amendments or reject individual items. Established with the primary purpose of reducing program spending, the IMAC could alter the fundamental nature of the Medicare benefit or advance policies that would steer beneficiaries to Medicare Advantage plans and other forms of privatized Medicare, authority that now lies with Congress.

Similar proposals being considered in the Senate to vest the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) with authority to cut program expenses are also troubling. MedPAC's decisions could only be overturned by a three-fifths vote in both chambers of Congress, yet this unelected body would have great latitude to determine policies potentially affecting millions of Medicare beneficiaries.

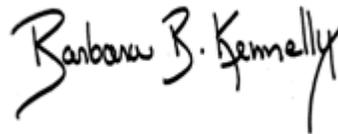
Of further concern, we understand that statutory spending targets and required sequestration of funding are being considered as an integral part of these proposals. Such a combination elevates the mandate to cut spending as the Commission's top priority, and leaves little room for concerns about beneficiary access to services or affordability, issues Congress traditionally weighs when making changes that affect beneficiaries.

The Congressional Budget Office has shown that Medicare's spending is driven by cost growth across the health care system. As the President himself has said, America does not face an entitlement crisis; we face a health care crisis. In light of this, proposals that single out Medicare for aggressive cost cutting are not only unwise but patently unfair. We believe that it is an imperative of health reform that cost growth throughout the entire health care system be addressed, not simply in the Medicare program.

As you pursue the goal of ensuring that every American has access to high-quality health care coverage, we urge you to ensure that Congress retains responsibility to maintain the value of the Medicare benefit. Submitting major changes to such an important program on a fast track through Congress with little opportunity for amendment runs counter to the Administration's call for transparency and participation by the American public in policy decisions. Enacting procedures to push through changes of this importance to millions of Americans, especially senior Americans, ultimately disenfranchises the public and hurts the political process.

We look forward to working with you to identify system-wide reforms that can improve Medicare and health care in general.

Cordially,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Barbara B. Kennelly". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial 'B'.

Barbara B. Kennelly
President and CEO