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Coalition to Protect Senior Care: Bush Budget Plan Dangerous to Seniors' Front Line Care Needs

In New Letter, Direct Care Workers Urge Senators Baucus and Grassley to Stop Bush Medicare Cuts

Joplin, MO (February 7, 2008) – In response to the Bush Administration's budget plan cutting U.S. seniors' Medicare-financed nursing home care by \$17 billion over five years, the Coalition to Protect Senior Care (CPSC) today called the proposal "dangerous to seniors' front line care needs," and announced at a news briefing that they will launch a new effort to stop the funding reductions, similar to the campaign waged last fall when the Coalition successfully opposed efforts to cut Medicare Part A nursing home benefits. The CPSC also released a new letter, delivered today to Senate Finance Committee Chairman Max Baucus (D-MT) and Ranking Member Charles Grassley (R-IA), urging them to fight the cuts.

"From the standpoint of our oldest, most vulnerable seniors and the direct care workers who serve them, the Bush Administration has put forward a budget proposal that is dangerous to every aspect of front line care giving," stated Lisa Cantrell, a co-founder of the National Association of Health Care Assistants, and a national spokesperson for the Coalition to Protect Senior Care. "As we successfully opposed previous efforts to cut our patients' Medicare-financed nursing home benefits, we will fight any attempt by the Bush Administration to slash the vital resources necessary to ensuring our oldest, sickest residents continue to receive the quality care they absolutely require."

The proposed five year \$17 billion Medicare cuts, described by Administration officials as designed to improve efficiency and productivity, are especially curious, Cantrell said in the Coalition's letter to Baucus and Grassley, given that the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) specifically stated just months ago that nursing homes must receive an inflationary update to promote "program efficiency, quality and sustainability."

States the letter, "Considering the reality that our nation's governors are bracing for more problematic state budget conditions, resulting in part from the continuing growth in the cost of providing quality care, it is perplexing that the Administration would set out this course of action. Conditions today are as challenging as they were when CMS issued its original guidance. This makes the Administration's new budget plan still more illogical, and we feel there is no legitimate way to defend a public policy approach of this nature."

Continues the Coalition letter to Sens. Baucus and Grassley, "In providing quality, 24-hour care and services to seniors, nursing homes like those we work in rely upon an annual Medicare cost of living update to meet rising costs – a full 70 percent of which are related to staffing. This crucial Medicare update allows for annual cost of living increases for staff, increases a facility's ability to enhance staffing, and provides the vital resources needed to improve and refurbish the facility with modern equipment and technology."

The CPSC membership – representing health care assistants, long term care nurses, certified nursing assistants and others who deliver round-the-clock, front-line care to seniors – are in Joplin, MO this week to consider the specifics of how, and in which states, they will fight the Bush budget plan. “In fighting the Medicare cuts, we will be considering a variety of ways to convey our message, including the use of paid media and grass roots activities successfully utilized in a variety of states in 2007.” Cantrell noted the CPSC generated more than 15,000 letters to Congress at a key time of last year’s budget deliberations.

The Coalition to Protect Senior Care consists of the American Association for Long Term Care Nursing (AALTCN); the American College of Health Care Administrators (ACHCA); the American Association of Nurse Assessment Coordinators (AANAC); the National Rural Health Association (NRHA); the American Association of Nurse Executives (AANEX); the American Occupational Therapy Association (AOTA); the American Physical Therapy Association (APTA); the American Society of Health Care Administration Executives (ASHCAE); ASHCAE state affiliate members representing Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Idaho, Iowa, Kansas, Maine, New Hampshire, New Mexico, New York, North Dakota, Oregon, Texas and Utah; the American Health Care Association (AHCA); the American Health Quality Association (AHQA); the National Association for the Support of Long Term Care (NASL); the National Association of Health Care Assistants (NAHCA); the Alliance for Quality Nursing Home Care; the Coalition of Women in Long Term Care (COWL); and the Senior Clinician Group. For more information, visit www.coalitiontoprotectseniorcare.org.

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