



# Committee On Finance

Max Baucus, Ranking Member

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## **Baucus Applauds Issuance of Medicare Regulations Expresses Concern over Lack of Details and Experience with the Discount Card**

(WASHINGTON, D.C.) U.S. Senator Max Baucus, Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, praised the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) for issuance of the proposed regulations to implement the Medicare prescription drug bill and new private plan options, including regional preferred provider plans. But he expressed concern with the regulations' lack of detail and delayed publication.

"I remain a proud supporter of the Medicare prescription drug legislation," Baucus said. "Although it is not perfect, the bill will provide a long-overdue prescription drug benefit to millions of elderly and disabled Americans, with comprehensive coverage for those of modest means. But I am disappointed that the proposed regulations were not published earlier, so that stakeholders had adequate time to review them. CMS is cutting implementation of the Medicare prescription drug bill down to the wire." The rules had been expected for publication in the spring.

Baucus also expressed concern over the lack of detail in the proposed regulations. The proposed regulations defer many decisions until the final rules are published later this year. "It is Congress' job to pass the law, and the administration's job to implement it," Baucus said. "I'll need more details in these regulations to be convinced that the administration is on the right track towards successful implementation." The voluntary prescription drug benefit is scheduled to begin January 1, 2006.

Baucus noted that the administration has received mixed reviews for implementation of the Medicare drug legislation thus far. Earlier this year, CMS began endorsing Medicare prescription discount cards, providing modest savings on prescription drugs until the drug benefit begins in 2006. Medicare beneficiaries have at least 40 discount cards from which to choose.

"Seniors in Montana tell me that they are hesitant to enroll in the new Medicare discount cart because it is too confusing," Baucus said. "I urge the administration to

make enrollment in the prescription drug program as simple as possible, without the confusion that has plagued the Medicare discount card program.”

Baucus also noted that enrollment in the discount card program would be significantly higher if the administration followed his recommendation to auto-enroll beneficiaries that currently receive financial assistance for their premiums and cost-sharing.

Baucus pledged to work with the administration and all members of Congress to implement the Medicare prescription program as quickly as possible to ensure that all Medicare seniors receive the benefits for which they are entitled.

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