



U.S. SENATE COMMITTEE ON

Finance

SENATOR CHUCK GRASSLEY, OF IOWA - CHAIRMAN

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Grassley Praises Funding to Educate Seniors About New Medicare Benefits

WASHINGTON -- Sen. Chuck Grassley, chairman of the Committee on Finance, today praised the Bush administration for dedicating millions of dollars this year and next year for state and local programs that counsel Medicare beneficiaries to help them understand and take advantage of new Medicare benefits.

“Congress just enacted the biggest improvements to Medicare in history,” Grassley said. “It’s important that older Americans have ways to learn about the new benefits so they choose the right option for them. This increased funding will help to hire more staff so more seniors will have access to Medicare experts.”

As Finance Committee chairman, Grassley was the Senate’s lead author of the Medicare improvement and modernization legislation that is now law. The law gives the federal government \$1 billion for fiscal years 2004 and 2005 to implement these landmark improvements. In January, Grassley and Sen. Max Baucus, ranking member, asked Health and Human Services Secretary Tommy Thompson to direct part of the \$1 billion to State Health Insurance Assistance Programs, which offer cost-effective beneficiary education, counseling and outreach services throughout the nation.

Late Wednesday, Thompson announced that he will award \$21.1 million this year and another \$31.7 million next year to these state and local programs. According to Thompson, this year’s funding represents a 69 percent increase above the fiscal year 2003 total, reflecting the increased emphasis on one-on-one advice and counseling for Medicare beneficiaries provided by the staff and volunteers at State Health Insurance Assistance Programs.

“I’ve been holding town meetings around Iowa to hear from Iowans about the new Medicare law,” Grassley said. “I’ve invited representatives of the State Health Insurance Assistance Program to help answer questions. These folks know the Medicare program inside and out, and their purpose is to help older Americans choose the right benefit option for them.”

State Health Insurance Assistance Programs are local organizations funded by the federal government through State Units on Aging or state insurance departments in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, the Virgin Islands and Puerto Rico that provide individual help to seniors and people

with disabilities with health insurance questions and problems. More than 12,000 volunteers and paid staff in nearly 1,200 local programs use their knowledge of Medicare and other local insurance programs and services to provide in-depth assistance to people with Medicare.