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Coalition Opposing Medicare Cut for Seniors' Nursing Home Funding Steps Up Activity Over Recess

Coalition to Protect Senior Care Touts Johnson-Thune Effort to Derail Cuts as Key Momentum-Builder

Joplin, MO – The recently-formed Coalition to Protect Senior Care, a broad array of clinician and front-line care giver organizations dedicated to ensuring Congress ends consideration of cuts to seniors' Medicare Part A nursing home funding, today said it will step up state and local activity this week, and noted new letters from U.S. Senators Tim Johnson (D-SD) and John Thune (R-SD) to the Senate leadership opposing cuts is a key development they will build upon.

"As Congress prepares to resume business in Washington next week, we intend to be very visible over the next several days in a variety of states," stated Lisa Cantrell, a co-founder of the National Association of Health Care Assistants (NAHCA), and a Coalition spokesperson. "We will continue to make our case there is no legitimate policy justification for implementing Medicare cuts that would severely undermine the efforts of direct care staff responsible for the vast majority of the nation's three million beneficiaries.

Cantrell hailed recent letters from Senators Johnson and Thune to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Ranking Member of the Senate Finance Committee, Charles Grassley (R-IA), respectively, as an indication the message is being heard at a key time: "One of our key messages is that the Medicare cuts in question would have a disproportionate, negative impact on America's rural seniors and the facilities and staff responsible for their care," she continued. "This bipartisan action by key rural-state Senators is an important development upon which to build, and we intend to do so."

Senator Johnson's letter to Reid and Senate Finance Chair Max Baucus (D-MT) reads:

As you are aware, the CHAMP Act passed by the House contained a provision cutting \$2.7 billion from Medicare funding for skilled nursing facilities (SNFs) over the next five years, and an alarming \$6.5 billion in the next decade... skilled nursing facilities (SNF's) provide rehabilitative, health care and related services to 3 million Medicare beneficiaries each year... Three out of every four patients are women, and more than half have annual incomes of less than \$10,000. SNFs employ 2.1 million direct care workers, 86 percent of whom are women and 30 percent of whom are minorities. Approximately 70 percent of SNF costs are labor related. I believe that any reduction in Medicare funding for SNF care will have a direct and negative impact on these Americans.

Senator Thune's letter to Grassley reads:

As you know, SNFs provide rehabilitative, health care and related services to 3 million Medicare beneficiaries each year, including approximately 6,677 seniors and other beneficiaries in my

state...I am concerned that substantial reductions in Medicare funding for SNF care will have a negative impact on Seniors... the reimbursement rates for nursing homes have fluctuated over the years, and Medicaid rates for all providers are often insufficient to cover costs. As we have expanded the Medicare program to pay for long-term care service, this funding has become even more crucial to sustain SNF services. As we address other important Medicare issues this fall, including a physician pay fix, I ask your assistance in stemming cuts to SNFs.

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 National Rural Health Association (NRHA); the American College of Health Care Administrators (ACHCA); 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; and the Senior Clinician Group.

Cantrell said that in addition to a stepped up effort to meet with staff and lawmakers over the recess period, the Coalition to Protect Senior Care has scheduled news events, media teleconferences and other grass roots contact efforts, and will refocus activity back in Washington when Congress reconvenes.

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