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CARDIN PRAISES ENACTMENT OF MEDICARE IMPROVEMENTS BILL

*Says Veto Override will Prevent Provider Cuts, Expand Preventive Services, and Ensure
Outpatient Rehab Therapy Access*

WASHINGTON – **U.S. Senator Benjamin L. Cardin** (D-MD) today praised the swift congressional override of President Bush veto of the **Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008** (H.R. 6331). The House voted by 383-41 and the Senate voted 70-26 to override the President's veto.

“In addition to preventing physician reimbursement cuts caused by the flawed payment formula, this important law strengthens the Medicare program by expanding access to preventive services, ensuring that seniors continue to receive needed outpatient rehabilitation therapy, and eliminating discriminatory treatment of mental health services,” said **Senator Cardin**.

The new law includes the following three initiatives introduced by Senator Cardin: It waives the deductible and extends coverage of the “Welcome to Medicare” physical from six months to one year; it allows the Secretary of Health and Human Services to expand preventive services as recommended by the U.S. Preventive Services Task Force; and it requires Medicare Part D to include coverage of previously-excluded anti-anxiety medicines, such as Xanax, and Valium.

If the President's veto had not been overridden, physician payments for Medicare services after June 30 would have been cut across-the-board by 10.6%. The Medicare bill also extends through December 31, 2009 the vital “exceptions” process for outpatient rehabilitation therapy services, ensuring that seniors recovering from complex illnesses, such as stroke or hip replacement, can receive necessary care in excess of the \$1,810 annual caps. Senator Cardin is a lead sponsor of legislation to permanently repeal the arbitrary limits on physical occupational, and speech-language therapy services.

“This law is important to everyone who cares about the health of America's seniors and the future of the Medicare program,” said **Senator Cardin**. “It ensures that seniors will retain access to needed medical care; it ensures their coverage of a needed class of prescription medicines, and it prevents devastating reimbursement cuts to providers from taking effect.”

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