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United States Senate

CHARLES E. GRASSLEY

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-1501

February 14, 2006

REPLY TO:

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- 131 WEST 3RD STREET
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- 307 FEDERAL BUILDING
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(712) 322-7103

Mr. Tony Beraldi
701 16th Avenue
Council Bluffs, Iowa 51501

Dear Mr. Beraldi:

Thank you for taking the time to share your concerns about the implementation of the Medicare prescription drug benefit. It is important for me to hear first hand accounts, such as yours, about problems that Iowans are experiencing.

The Center for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) has taken these problems seriously and has moved quickly to address these issue as they have arisen. CMS has continued to provide additional guidance to those involved with implementing the benefit. This has included holding conference calls with pharmacists, plan sponsors, and partners; providing more detailed guidelines on specific problem areas; and adding staff and resources to handle incoming calls.

Soon after the problem of long waits was reported, CMS asked plans to increase the capacity on their help lines and to identify a technical assistance number for pharmacists to receive support without redirection. I have been told that the wait times have gotten much better over the course of the month.

CMS has assured me that they will continue to work with pharmacists, drug plans, and states to provide the best service possible. In addition to the problems that have already been identified, CMS is taking action to anticipate future one and fix them before they happen.

On February 8, 2006, the Senate Finance Committee, of which I am the chair, held a hearing on the implementation of the Medicare prescription drug benefit. Dr. Mark McClellan, the CMS Administrator, along with several stakeholders and beneficiary representatives, provided testimony on their experiences with the drug benefit.

CHAIRMAN,
FINANCE

Committee Assignments:

BUDGET
JUDICIARY
AGRICULTURE

CHAIRMAN,
INTERNATIONAL NARCOTICS
CONTROL CAUCUS

I take the responsibility of oversight of the Medicare program and the new drug benefit very seriously. I will continue to seek improvements from the federal officials implementing the benefit to make sure they resolve these issues quickly. This will involve conversations, committee meetings, hearing and whatever else we need to make sure the problems are resolved. I will also continue to seek the advice of Iowans and people in the field about their experiences.

Thanks again for contacting me. It is important for me to hear from you and I urge you to keep in touch.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Chuck". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator