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**AARP, GEORGIA PHYSICIANS CALLING ON SENATORS ISAKSON AND
CHAMBLISS TO SUPPORT BILL TO IMPROVE MEDICARE,
PROTECT ACCESS TO DOCTORS**

ATLANTA – AARP Georgia and the Medical Association of Georgia (MAG) today said that last week a minority in the U.S. Senate derailed a critical bipartisan bill that would have stopped a 10.6 percent payment cut to doctors who treat Medicare patients, kept Medicare premiums fair, and made significant improvements to a program that 44 million Americans depend on.

The organizations said that on June 26, a handful of senators voted to block the “Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008” (H.R. 6331), which would have helped people on Medicare maintain access to their doctors, kept premiums fair and improved benefits for the most vulnerable while boosting health care quality through national e-prescribing.

“We are deeply troubled that the Senate voted to block a bill with bipartisan support that would have preserved patients’ access to their doctors and improved Medicare for the 44 million Americans who depend on it,” says AARP Georgia State Director Ken Mitchell. “For the sake of older Americans and people with disabilities, we urge Senators Isakson and Chambliss to listen to their constituents and reconsider voting for H.R. 6331 when the bill comes up for a vote after the congressional recess.”

In addition to preventing a 10.6 percent payment cut to doctors, the Medicare bill would have helped keep premiums fair, strengthened protections for lower income beneficiaries, improved Medicare’s coverage of preventive services, and made Medicare more efficient through electronic prescribing. The Senate is currently scheduled to reconsider H.R. 6331 immediately following the July 4th recess.

“It’s imperative that we have a Medicare payments solution so we can provide our patients in Georgia with timely access to the health care and the peace of mind they deserve,” says MAG President Jack M. Chapman Jr., M.D. “And that’s a message that Medical Association of Georgia leadership reinforced with Senators Isakson and Chambliss in a conference call this past Sunday. On behalf of the 14,000 Georgia physicians and our Medicare patients, we urged them to vote in support of H.R. 6331 when the Senate reconvenes on July 7.”

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Throughout the debate on Medicare legislation, AARP, the American Medical Association (AMA) and MAG have engaged their members in the fight to keep Medicare fair and protect access to doctors. Hundreds of thousands of AARP supporters, including more than 21,000 in Georgia, called and e-mailed Congress, signed petitions, wrote letters to their local papers, and participated in Keep Medicare Fair events around the country over the past several weeks. In addition, more than 41,000 patients and physicians called Congress in June using the AMA grassroots hotline, and the AMA is airing new radio and television ads that urge opponents of H.R. 6331 to put patients' access to care before insurance profits by voting for the bill as soon as they return to Washington from their holiday recess.

AARP and MAG are encouraging all Georgia residents to call Sen. Isakson and Sen. Chambliss using AMA's grassroots hotline at 800.833.6354 and urge them to support H.R. 6331.

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