United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

April 19, 2006

The Honorable Bill Frist
Senate Majority Leader
509 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Majority Leader Frist:

Enrollment in the new Medicare prescription drug program is well underway. Across the country, over 40 million Medicare beneficiaries have been presented with the choice of signing up for the program. Unfortunately, many seniors and individuals with disabilities are understandably concerned and confused about the new benefit.

Medicare beneficiaries face a number of prescription drug plan options, and choosing the right plan can be a challenge. Each of the options differs in terms of premiums, cost-sharing requirements, drugs covered and pharmacy access. Sorting through these plans has proven to be difficult and time consuming. Further complicating matters, the Medicare drug program is experiencing a variety of implementation problems that have disproportionately affected the most vulnerable beneficiaries.

Yet, beneficiaries who do not act by the May 15, 2006, deadline and who enroll at a later date will face a financial penalty. Seniors who choose a plan after May 15, 2006, will be penalized by a one percent increase in their premium for each month they delay their choice.

Legislation has been introduced in the Senate which would expand the existing six-month open enrollment period to the entire year of 2006. By extending the enrollment deadline and delaying late enrollment penalties, we can make sure that our constituents are not forced to make hasty decisions about their health care. The stakes here are too high to deny seniors the time and resources they need to make an informed decision.

We all share the goal of ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries have sufficient time and assistance to make a wise decision regarding prescription drug coverage. Extending the deadline for the new program is a small but important step that will help ease the transition to this new program. We urge you, as the Senate Majority Leader, to bring legislation extending the Medicare prescription deadline to the Senate floor as soon as possible.

Sincerely,

Bill Nelson

Olympia Snowe

Harry Reid

Mike DeWine

Lincoln Chafee

Arlen Specter

Ted Kennedy

Jay Rockefeller

John F. Kerry

James M Jeffords

Blanche L. Lincoln

Ron Wyden

Ben Nelson

Kent Kennedy

Jeff Sprague

Jon Tinker

Evan Bayh

Chuck Schumer

Maria Cantwell

Mary L. Landrieu

Ken Salazar

Barbara A. Mikulski

Robert F. Menendez

Byron L. Dorgan

Frank R. Lautenberg

Barbara Boxer

Debbie Stabenow

Dick Durbin

Mark Pryor

Tim Johnson

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Chris Dodd

Bill Bradley

Tom Harkin

Mark Dayton

Patty Murray

Carl Levin

Patrick Leahy

Joe Biden

Daniel K. Inouye

Ron Wyden

Herb Kohl

Dianne Feinstein

Robert C. Byrd

Debbie Stabenow

Paul S. Sarbanes

Jack Reed

Tom Carper