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For Immediate Release – July 31, 2007

CELEBRATE MEDICARE'S BIRTHDAY BY KEEPING MEDICARE ALIVE AND STRONG

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Medicare, this country's health care program for older people and people with disabilities, turned 42 on July 28. Enacted in 1965 because private health insurance companies did not want to insure older people, Medicare is one of this country's most successful programs. Thanks to Medicare, virtually all older Americans now have health insurance and access to health care.

Tragically, policies put in place over the last decade threaten to destroy the program that was created in 1965. Overpayments to private insurance companies threaten the solvency of the whole program, and result in extra premium costs to all Medicare beneficiaries. The plans offered by the private insurance companies lack the uniformity and stability of the traditional Medicare program. These plans can choose the parts of the country in which they operate, can choose when they will enter and leave the Medicare market, and can change the benefits and cost-sharing they offer every year.

Congress has the opportunity to celebrate Medicare's birthday by protecting the integrity of the Medicare program. We urge the House of Representatives to enact the Children's Health and Medicare Protection Act of 2007 (CHAMP), which reduces overpayments to private insurance plans. CHAMP would eliminate cost-sharing for preventive benefits and reduce cost-sharing for mental health benefits, would make more low-income beneficiaries eligible for assistance with their Part B premiums and their prescription drug costs, and would increase consumer protections for all Medicare beneficiaries. What better birthday present can Congress give to Medicare than to assure its future while directly improving benefits for everyone the program was intended to serve?