United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

May 4, 2011

The Honorable Barack Obama
President
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Ave., N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to commend you for your opposition to turning Medicare into a voucher system as proposed in the House Republican's FY2012 budget. Since the enactment of Medicare in 1965, America's seniors have no longer lived in fear of losing affordable, comprehensive health insurance when they retire. Unfortunately, some in Congress want to dismantle Medicare in order to help offset the costs of tax cuts for the very wealthiest in our country.

The House Republican budget for Fiscal Year 2012 would end Medicare as we know it and throw seniors into the private market with no more than an insufficient voucher to offset the rising cost of private health insurance. So-called "premium support" – giving seniors a voucher of approximately $8,000 as proposed by the Republican budget – is a reckless and irresponsible way to address the health care needs of older Americans. And it is an unacceptable means by which to finance tax cuts for those who are earning ten times or more than the retirement income of the average Medicare recipient.

Seniors, who have paid into the system their entire working lives, deserve affordable, secure health coverage upon retirement. According to the Congressional Budget Office (CBO), in the first year of the voucher program, out-of-pocket expenses for seniors would double under the Republican plan to more than $12,500 annually. For seniors on a fixed income, a doubling of out-of-pocket expenses is simply unaffordable, particularly when the average Social Security benefit is only $14,000 per year.

The Republican budget proposal would not keep pace with the rate of inflation for health care, meaning seniors would pay ever higher out-of-pocket costs. Under the proposal, the annual increase for the vouchers will fall short of the actual rate of inflation for health care – meaning out-of-pocket expenses for seniors will continue to soar. And to make matters worse, the Republican budget would repeal the only credible means of restraining health care costs – the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act.

While deficit reduction is essential, balancing the budget by dismantling Medicare is both unfair to hard-working Americans and counterproductive. Seniors who are unable to afford Medicare

or its equivalent will skip preventive services, not take necessary medication, and delay treatment leading to potentially undetected illnesses and more expensive care. If Medicare is turned into a voucher system and the health reform law is dismantled, millions of seniors will be left under- or uninsured. This will add to the burden on our nation's already overwhelmed emergency rooms and result in increased demands on Medicaid as seniors exhaust their life savings.

Before the passage of Medicare, only half of America's seniors had health insurance, and most of those with insurance only had coverage for inpatient hospital costs. Additionally, approximately 30 percent of seniors lived below the poverty line before Medicare. Now, only 1.8 percent lack health coverage and less than 9 percent live below the poverty line. We cannot afford to reverse these gains through the ultimate form of rationing health care for seniors: the replacement of Medicare as we know it with insufficient vouchers for private health coverage.

We urge you to protect America's seniors and oppose any attempts to dismantle Medicare.

Sincerely,

Senator Sherrod Brown

Senator Jon Tester

Senator Mark Begich

Senator Jeff Merkley

Senator Jack Reed

Senator Patrick Leahy

Senator Barbara Mikulski

Senator Benjamin L. Cardin

Senator Dianne Feinstein

Senator John F. Kerry

Senator Harry Reid

Senator Max Baucus

Senator Daniel Kahikina Akaka

Senator Barbara Boxer

Senator Jeff Bingaman

Senator Charles E. Schumer

Senator Bernard Sanders

Senator Mark Udall

Senator Robert Menendez

Senator Debbie Stabenow

Senator Kent Conrad

Senator Ron Wyden

Senator Tim Johnson

Senator Richard Blumenthal

Senator Mary Landrieu

Senator Frank R. Lautenberg

Senator Dick Durbin

Senator Al Franken

Senator Sheldon Whitehouse

Senator Tom Harkin

Senator Patty Murray

Senator Chris Coons

Senator Daniel Inouye

Senator Mark Warner

Senator Michael Bennet

Senator Joe Manchin

Senator Claire McCaskill

Senator John D. Rockefeller IV

Senator Robert P. Casey Jr.

Senator Amy Klobuchar

Senator Jeanne Shaheen

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand

Senator Tom Udall

Senator Herb Kohl

Senator Ben Nelson

Senator Jim Webb

Senator Maria Cantwell

Senator Kay Hagan

Senator Mark Pryor

Senator Bill Nelson