

Bill includes Altmire provisions to protect seniors' access to medical equipment, help seniors obtain prescription drug coverage

(Washington, D.C.) -- U.S. Congressman Jason Altmire (PA-04) today voted to override the president's veto of important Medicare legislation that will delay implementation of the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Service's (CMS) competitive bidding program for durable medical equipment, prevent a 10.6 percent pay cut for doctors, and enact a provision authored by Congressman Altmire to help millions of seniors obtain prescription drug coverage. The House voted to override the president's veto of the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (H.R. 6331) by a vote of 383-41. The Senate is also expected to override the president's veto tonight.

Congressman Altmire has led efforts in the House to delay CMS's competitive bidding program. As Chairman of the House Small Business Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight, Congressman Altmire held one of the first hearings highlighting competitive bidding's flaws on October 31, 2007. He also led several Congressional letters to CMS, the Small Business Administration and others calling for adjustments to the program to ensure patient care was not jeopardized.

“For months, I have worked to ensure CMS’s highly flawed competitive bidding program would not limit seniors’ access to the medical suppliers who can best meet their needs. With today’s vote, we have won a significant victory for western Pennsylvania’s seniors, the doctors who provide their care, and home medical suppliers,” said Congressman Altmire. **“Now that Congress has sent competitive bidding back to the drawing board, I hope that significant improvements will be made to ensure this program reduces costs without jeopardizing patients’ access to quality care.”**

Under CMS's competitive bidding program, which went into effect on July 1, only a limited number of suppliers were able to sell medical equipment to Medicare beneficiaries. This caused hundreds of small medical equipment suppliers in western Pennsylvania to lose their ability to participate in Medicare, leading to the loss of a significant portion of their business and preventing seniors from accessing suppliers they have gone to for years.

“For 11 years, AdvaCare Home Services has provided education and services to western Pennsylvanians to ensure they get the respiratory and medical equipment they need,” said Tammy Zelenko, President and CEO of AdvaCare Home Services. **“Under CMS’s poorly designed Competitive Bidding Program, the service is fragmented, and there is no longer a continuity of care to serve the customers who depend on us. Congressman Altmire showed great leadership and determination in working to delay this program so that seniors could continue going to the medical equipment suppliers who they know and trust.”**

Once the Senate overrides the president's veto of the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008, the competitive bidding program will be delayed for 18 months to allow CMS to make much-needed improvements. The cost of this delay is fully paid for by reducing payment rates for medical equipment included in the competitive bidding program by 9.5

percent nationwide.

The Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 also includes a provision of the Relief and Elimination of the Medicare Enrollment Deadline Penalty (REMEDY) Act (H.R. 1310), legislation Congressman Altmire introduced last year to provide relief to over 4 million Medicare beneficiaries who could be penalized for not signing up for prescription drug coverage during the Part D program's enrollment period. A barrier to coverage, known as the late enrollment penalty, will be permanently waived for those who can least afford it.