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AARP AND LSMS CRITICIZE SENATOR DAVID VITTER FOR BLOCKING BILL TO PROTECT ACCESS TO PHYSICIANS AND IMPROVE MEDICARE

Baton Rouge, LA- Gridlock has paralyzed the U.S. Senate, derailing a critical bipartisan bill that would stop a 10 percent cut to doctors who treat Medicare patients, keep Medicare premiums fair, and make significant improvements to a program that 44 million Americans depend on.

Last week Senator Vitter joined a minority of Senators voting to block legislation that would ensure people on Medicare maintain access to their physicians, keep premiums fair and improve benefits for the most vulnerable. The Senate vote on the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (H.R. 6331), which passed by a bipartisan landslide in the House of Representatives, was purposely scheduled for June 26 so it would become law before the cuts to physicians payments were to go into effect on July 1.

"We are deeply troubled that Senator Vitter voted to block a bill with bipartisan support that would have preserved patients' access to their physicians and improved Medicare for the 44 million Americans who depend on it," Nancy McPherson, AARP State Director, said. "For the sake of older Americans, people with disabilities and military families, we urge Senator Vitter to listen to his constituents and reconsider his vote when the bill comes up again after the recess."

In addition to preventing a 10 percent cut in payments to physicians, the Medicare bill would: help keep premiums fair; strengthen protections for lower income beneficiaries; improve Medicare's coverage of preventive services, and make Medicare more efficient through electronic prescribing. The Senate currently is scheduled to reconsider H.R. 6331 following the July 4th recess.

"Because Senator Vitter stood with the Bush administration position, the Senate went home for July 4th recess leaving care for our nation's seniors, disabled individuals, and military families hanging in the balance," Dr. Russell Klein, President, Louisiana State Medical Society, said. "We call on Senator Vitter to return to Washington and do what's right – stop the Medicare cuts and vote to ensure patient access to care and improve health security for 44 million Americans."

Throughout the debate on Medicare legislation, AARP, AMA and LSMS have engaged their members in the fight to keep Medicare fair and preserve access to physicians. Accordingly, AARP supporters, including 23,552 e-activists in Louisiana, were asked to call and email Congress, sign petitions, and write letters to their local papers urging 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.

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