



Word From Washington

Building A Medicaid Bipartisan Bridge



by Jeffrey Lewis

(NAPSA)—With the nation increasingly politically divided, two United States senators are reaching across the aisle to work on a growing problem facing Medicaid: truth in rebates.

The bipartisan duo, Senators Chuck Grassley (R, Iowa) and Ron Wyden (D, Oregon), have reintroduced the Right Rebate Act of 2018, which would close a loophole in Medicaid that has allowed pharmaceutical manufacturers to misclassify their drugs and overcharge taxpayers by billions of dollars. The bill also affords the Department of Health and Human Services additional authority to ensure drugs are properly classified. The legislation would give the Secretary of Health and Human Services (HHS) greater authority and tools to monitor drug manufacturers that participate in the Medicaid Drug Rebate Program (MDRP) and would allow the Secretary to impose civil monetary penalties when drugs are expressly misclassified.

The Senators' argument: Pharmaceutical manufacturers are gaming the system by intentionally misclassifying drugs to reduce rebate obligations and starving states of millions of dollars owed. The bipartisan legislation fixes that problem and sends a clear signal to PhRMA companies that neither Republicans nor Democrats will tolerate the callous disregard of honesty and transparency in government.

The senators should be applauded for their courage to work collaboratively to solve a pressing health care issue, putting the needs of the nation ahead of politics.

They follow a trail blazed by Senators Patrick Moynihan (D, NY) and

John Heinz (R, PA), who argued more than 29 years ago that the federal government was using the Social Security Trust Fund to mask the size of the deficit. Moynihan referred to it as thievery; Heinz called it embezzlement.

In an era in which bipartisanship has become a rarity, the work of Senators Grassley and Wyden should not be ignored. Their courage to collaborate and their willingness to continue to tackle tough, often boring health care issues shines like a beacon in the dark tunnel of congressional fingerpointing.

For many years, Senator Grassley has doggedly pursued the truth in government spending, much as former Senator Bill Proxmire, a Democrat, did before him. Grassley's commitment to honesty in government is well known in Washington, D.C. Senator Wyden, who built his political career on creating health care solutions for seniors, also stands as a national icon for transparency in health care spending and is a hero to those without a voice.

While neither senator could be considered a household name outside his home state, in the world of health care, both men represent something special: integrity. Their zeal to solve this specific Medicaid problem should be appreciated by every governor in the nation, as it has the potential to free up funds to operate health care programs in their states. But most importantly, the senators' bipartisan collaboration sets a tone long missing in politics that others would do well to follow.

• *Jeffrey Lewis is the president and CEO of Legacy Health Endowment in Turlock, Calif. The views expressed are his own.*