

**Opening Statement of Senator Larry Craig**  
***“Drug Discount Cards: Measuring the Savings”***  
**U.S. Senate Special Committee on Aging Forum**  
**September 23, 2004**

Good afternoon and welcome. We have convened today’s forum to take a hard look at the facts – facts about the new Medicare prescription drug card program and the real savings it offers to America’s seniors.

It’s no secret there’s been some skeptical chatter about this program -- but the facts, I am pleased to say, speak louder than words.

First, Medicare Administrator Dr. Mark McClellan is here today to announce fresh Medicare data showing clearly that the drug card program continues to provide seniors very significant savings – and that these savings are solid and improving.

But let’s not just take Dr. McClellan’s word for it.

Also joining us are representatives of the three major independent studies conducted so far on the drug card program – all of which confirm the serious savings available under this program.

As anyone familiar with the world of health care policy would agree, the organizations affiliated with these studies are among the most respected in the field – namely the Kaiser Family Foundation, the Lewin Group, the American Enterprise Institute, the Healthcare Leadership Council, and Health Policy Alternatives.

And needless to say, when experts at groups as diverse as these all come out in general agreement, I think it’s safe to say we’re onto something.

I am also pleased that today’s discussion also coincides with this week’s announcement that Medicare will soon launch a new program to vastly accelerate enrollment of lower-income seniors – those who are eligible for an additional \$600 in cash assistance this year and another \$600 next year.

No, this program is not perfect, and yes, there’s been some confusion. But this is normal with any new program – and as we’ll hear today, improvements are continually being made.

Finally, I believe it is also important to look ahead. Today’s drug card program is just a beginning – a stepping stone, if you will -- toward implementation of the full prescription drug benefit less than two years away. I hope our panelists can comment on the lessons we can learn today as we prepare for the tomorrow of 2006 and beyond.

Unfortunately, neither my schedule nor Dr. McClellan’s will permit us to stay for the balance of today’s discussion. However, it is a pleasure to welcome all of you here today and to thank our distinguished panelists for their valuable contribution.