

# United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0905

April 14, 2004

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson  
Secretary  
Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Thompson,

I recently was informed you have begun warning doctors that they can be fined or excluded from Medicare for charging seniors extra money for so-called boutique, or concierge, health care. I can't emphasize enough how relieved I am that the administration is zeroing in on a growing problem facing elderly patients.

Concierge care is creating a two-tier Medicare program – one for those who can afford to pay for additional perks, one for those who cannot. It's important that we keep our promise to all of America's seniors to provide them with basic, quality health-care coverage.

Until we ban the practice of charging Medicare patients extra fees just for access to their health care provider, individuals who offer these platinum practices will continue undermining the very program that so many seniors have come to rely on.

During my time in the Senate, one of my top priorities has been assuring equal access to Medicare by banning boutique medicine. Two years ago, I introduced legislation to prevent Medicare from reimbursing doctors who charged their patients extra fees for access to Medicare services. Nothing in the legislation interferes with a doctor's ability to set up a practice in which his or her patients can pay more for non-covered services.

Last year, Congress passed another of my proposals that requires the General Accounting Office to study and report on the implications of the growing problem of concierge care. We're hopeful this study will bolster our concerns.

Meantime, I'm glad that more attention is being focused on this issue. We still have more to do. I hope my colleagues in the Congress will pass my bill – with your support. And I hope your inspector general continues to crack down on the related problem of limiting access to Medicare.

Sincerely,

