Congress of the United States Washington, DC 20515

February 2, 2012

Barry Rand, CEO AARP 601 E Street, NW Washington DC 20049

Dear Mr. Rand:

As medical professionals with more than 450 years of clinical experience caring for patients, we write to you out of concern for our nation's seniors and aging Baby Boomers and the future of the Medicare program. We are concerned that Congressional inaction to strengthen the Medicare program jeopardizes the health and welfare of the millions of Americans who depend on Medicare.

Currently, about 48 million individuals across our country depend on the Medicare program for health coverage, and an estimated 10,000 Baby Boomers are turning 65 years old each day. However, the Chief Actuary of the Medicare program has warned that, under a worst case scenario, the program's Hospital Insurance Trust Fund could be insolvent as soon as 2016. Even the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office expects that Medicare trust fund to be bankrupt as early as 2020. This means that unless Congress acts to strengthen and shore up the program, in just a few years, Medicare's funding shortfall will prohibit seniors from being able to receive the quality care they need.

With this prognosis, it is clear that seniors cannot afford to wait for reform. Congress must act soon to save Medicare for our patients, because inaction itself would end Medicare as we know it. Every day that we delay reform, the greater the chances are that current and future retirees will be dramatically impacted by the Medicare trust fund's impending bankruptcy.

Fortunately, changes to Medicare can improve the program for seniors and taxpayers – and that improving the program's health is essential both to seniors' care and our fiscal health. AARP recently cited the "need to start a national discussion on strengthening health and retirement security for hard-working Americans." We agree. As AARP said, "we believe it is time to bring the debate about the future of Medicare out from behind closed doors in Washington and into the public so Americans have a voice in any discussion about the future of this program."

We all believe that the American people deserve a mature, informed, and thoughtful conversation about how to save the Medicare program and shore-up its financing. Current seniors and Baby Boomers retiring in the future in particular deserve a candid account of the program's current challenges, because they are the ones who could be most severely and negatively impacted by the status quo.

Because AARP identifies itself as a nonpartisan organization whose mission it is to "help people 50 and over improve their lives," AARP has a duty to its members to be particularly clear about the outlook for Medicare and the opportunities for improvement. Absent reform, AARP member's aged 50-56 today – as well as future members – will see the end of Medicare as we know it. Unless Congress intervenes, these seniors will not have access to the Medicare program as we know it today. The program's future inability to pay its bills will erode senior's access to quality medical professionals and services they rely upon. So, for current and future AARP members, one thing is clear: Congress must act very soon to save Medicare.

For too long politicians and special interest groups have used the politics of fear to paralyze the debate and continue the status quo. They have promised seniors and supporters that there will be no changes to Medicare. Unfortunately, as long as politicians obscure the Medicare program's prognosis for political benefit and stakeholders like AARP fail to publicly challenge these political calculations by educating their membership on the structural financing challenges facing the program, a national conversation about how to best save the Medicare program will not move forward. As health care professionals with actual health care experience, we have had many honest conversations with our patients about their health and welfare. We believe the public deserves this same consideration now. Americans need to know the truth about the program's challenges.

It is time for stakeholders to put behind them political-point-scoring for elections, and offer specific, concrete proposals for saving Medicare. In light of the status quo that will end Medicare as we know it, we applaud the development of bipartisan efforts that have advanced our national discussion through specific Medicare policy proposals – like Lieberman/Coburn, Rivlin/Domenici, and Wyden/Ryan, to highlight just a few. While none of us agrees with every detail of every proposal, each of these thoughtful approaches have sought to start the discussion by offering a bipartisan way forward to save Medicare. Unfortunately, each of these proposals has also been met with some attacks and opposition – opposition that has been tellingly partisan, personalized, and political. But these proposals were not designed to be perfect, finalized products, but rather platforms intended to advance the discussion. Serious discussion – not salacious demagoguery –is the response we believe such proposals deserve.

As we head into this new year, we invite our colleagues, stakeholders, and others to join us in engaging in a serious discussion about how to avoid the insolvency of the Medicare trust fund, which would end Medicare as we know it. Because any substantive discussion requires a sharing of ideas and viewpoints that is respectful, realistic, and rigorous, we invite AARP to explain what concrete, specific policy proposals AARP would support to save Medicare. Further, because a substantive discussion on solutions requires recognition of the magnitude of the problem, we invite AARP to join us in publicly urging all Members of Congress – Republican, Democrat, and Independent – to acknowledge the approaching insolvency of the Medicare trust fund and the program's structural financing challenges. We know that AARP has opposed some Medicare reform proposals in the past, but we are focused on the future and want to know what specific proposals – in concrete details – AARP would support to protect its members and the Medicare program. We trust AARP shares our goal of keeping our commitments to current and future seniors by preventing insolvency and putting the program's financing on a sustainable path.

As experienced health care professionals, we believe we must act very soon to adopt thoughtful approaches to save Medicare. We look forward to AARP's response.

Sincerely,

Member of Congress

Tom Coburn, M.D.

U.S. Senator

John Barrasso, M.D. U.S. Senator

> John Boozman, O.D. U.S. Senator

Paul (Bur Paul Broun, M.D. Member of Congress

Paul Gosar, DDS Member of Congress

Sohn Fleming, M.D. Member of Congress

Diane Black, R.N. Member of Congress

ine Black

Scott DesJarlais, M.D. Member of Congress

Phil Roe, M.D.

Member of Congress

Bill Cassidy, M.D. Member of Congress

Larry Buschon, M.D. Member of Congress

Dan Benishek, M.D. Member of Congress

Andy Harris, M.D. Member of Congress

Ann Marie Buerkle, R.N. Member of Congress

Michael Burgess, M.D. Member of Congress

Charles Boustany, M.D. Member of Congress

Michael Simpson, DDS Member of Congress