



Mr. WYDEN. Mr. President, I rise today with Senator **GRASSLEY** to introduce the Medicare **Data Access for Transparency and Accountability Act**. I would like to begin by thanking my friend and esteemed colleague for his unwavering commitment to greater transparency and accountability in government. This Medicare DATA Act advances that goal.

Sunshine continues to be the greatest disinfectant. In that light, the Medicare DATA Act ensures all taxpayers have access to Medicare Claims Database, both to aid them in making medical decisions, and in understanding what their money is paying for in this vital, yet enormous, health program. The Medicare Claims Database is an important resource for public and private stakeholders as it captures healthcare provider payment and claims information for roughly one-third of the United States healthcare system. But why isn't this information already available?

In 1978, the Department of Health Education and Welfare attempted to release this information, upon request, under the premise that accessibility to the source data was in the public interest and therefore should be made available for public consumption. An injunction by a Florida court, however, ordered otherwise.

I'm pleased that the Florida court has reevaluated that decision and recently lifted the injunction. This is a step in the right direction, but the decision still leaves access to this data "opaque." Data requests are still subject to the Freedom of Information Act and can be denied by Health and Human Services. Passage of the Medicare DATA Act would put an end to that loophole.

Information affecting the American taxpayer should part of the public domain in a free society. With this principle in mind, I join with Senator Grassley in changing "business as usual."

I urge my colleagues to support this legislation so that Medicare data is finally fully transparent and available to Medicare beneficiaries and taxpayers alike. I look forward to working with my colleagues in this effort.