

MAG Members Key “Grassroots Victory” For Medicare Bill, AMA Urging Physicians to Call U.S. Senators Today as Next Step

In what it calls a “stunning grassroots victory for physicians”, the American Medical Association (AMA) says that the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 6331 – the “Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008” – by a vote of 355 to 59. AMA says its nationwide grassroots effort influenced a number of congressional leaders, and AMA recognized MAG members for the significant role that they played in the bill’s passage.

AMA says that H.R. 6331...

- Extends the 0.5 percent increase through 2008 and provides a 1.1 percent increase for calendar year 2009.
- Extends non-controversial provisions (e.g., GPCI floor on physician work). It also includes incentive payments for electronic prescribing, funding for the medical home demonstration, improved payments for anesthesia teaching programs, and adjustments to payments for mental health services. Physician-owned hospitals are not addressed by the bill.
- Halts the competitive DME bidding program for 18 months, and includes important exemptions for physicians who would have had to obtain accreditation to provide off-the-shelf orthotics in their offices.
- Eliminates the Senate's cuts to oxygen and wheelchair providers.
- Includes Medicare payment levy language that would require CMS to garnish payments to health care providers who are delinquent in their income taxes. CMS has the authority to participate in this IRS program, but it does not currently do so. The extension of the Medicare scarcity bonus for primary care is not included in the bill.
- Does *not* adversely affect Medicare Advantage. It does, however, provide critical relief for physicians and patients by forstalling the proposed cuts that would prove disastrous for Medicare.

As a next step, H.R. 6331 will be introduced to the Senate by Sen. Harry Reid **tomorrow, Thursday, June 26.**

MAG is asking its members to CALL U.S. Sen. Saxby Chambliss and U.S. Sen. Johnny Isakson using AMA’s Grassroots Hotline at 800.833.6354 and urge them to 1) vote to bring H.R. 6331 up for debate and 2) support H.R. 6331.

AMA says that the White House is suggesting it might veto the measure and it reports that the Republican Caucus is urging a "no" vote on H.R. 6331. AMA, nonetheless,

believes that a concerted grassroots effort will result in both the 60 votes needed to make H.R. 6331 “veto-proof” and exert additional pressure on key Republicans.

Go to www.clerk.house.gov/evs/2008/roll443.xml for a summary of the H.R. 6331 vote count.

For additional information, visit AMA’s Web site at www.ama-assn.org/ama/pub/category/14332.html.