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## **AMA votes to continue endorsement of House health reform as it pursues SGR reform**

The American Medical Association staved off a push to rescind its endorsement of the House health reform bill, which passed late Saturday, easily voting down a measure to reverse course on the association's qualified endorsement of the legislation. But AMA President James Rohack made it clear the group views legislation to permanently reform the Medicare physician payment formula, expected to be taken up by the House next week, “an essential” element of whatever health reforms eventually make their way to the president's desk.

A multi-year physician payment reform bill recently failed on the Senate floor, but Senate leadership said it will be taken up again following a health reform vote. As the strategy evolves AMA is keeping quiet on the Senate health reform bill, but 20 surgical groups, led by the American College of Surgeons, recently put Senate leadership on notice they will oppose the chamber's health reform bill unless a permanent doc pay fix is added and other provisions are significantly revised ([see related story](#)). Some state medical societies are also opposing key provisions in the bill, including a proposed independent Medicare payment commission ([see related story](#)).

The overarching question is whether House and Senate fiscal conservatives -- including members of the Blue Dog Coalition -- will approve a pending \$210 billion bill that repeals the Medicare physician payment formula and installs a new system to update payments, but isn't paid for.

AMA President James Rohack said the vote to continue the group's support of the House bill represents a “defining moment in the history of the AMA” but added that lawmakers “must pass H.R. 3961,” the House doc payment fix bill, which he called an “essential element of health reform and to fulfill Congress' obligations to current and future Medicare patients.”

**A state medical society member who attended the House of Delegates meeting in Houston said that AMA membership continues to be split on health reform.** “I kind of felt like it was split 50/50. For every two that are against it, there were two for it,” said the state medical society member. The medical society official said that AMA leadership addressed the House of Delegates about the support for the House bill “and said a lot of people are saying Congress played us.”

The vote on a carefully worded resolution that said the association “does not endorse” HR 3962 failed by a two-to-one margin, 350 against and 167 for the measure.

A second resolution asking AMA to oppose a public option was a little closer, but still failed with 315 against and 167 for the provision.

The Medical Association of Georgia said it was disappointed that the resolutions to oppose a public health insurance option and to withdraw support for the House health reform bill failed, but was encouraged that the HOD approved measures supporting a patient's right to privately contract with their physician. The wording of the resolution calls for AMA to “actively and publicly support the inclusion in health care reform legislation the right of patients and physicians to privately contract, without penalty to patient or physician.”

The association also hailed the passage of an AMA resolution “to oppose an unaccountable federal entity [an independent Medicare advisory commission] from dictating future health-care policy.”

The idea of an IMAC, however, is strongly supported by key senators, including Finance health subcommittee Chair Jay Rockefeller (D-WV). -- *Brett Coughlin*([bcoughlin@iwpnews.com](mailto:bcoughlin@iwpnews.com))