

The House of Representatives just passed H.R. 4994, the "Medicare and Medicaid Extenders Act of 2010," on a bipartisan vote of 409-2. This legislation, which passed the Senate yesterday by unanimous consent, would stabilize Medicare physician payments at current rates for 12 months, through the end of 2011. It will now be sent to the White House for President Obama to sign into law.

In addition to providing an additional 12-month reprieve from the 25 percent Medicare physician payment cut scheduled to take effect on January 1, the bill extends a number of payment policies that were set to expire at the end of this year. It also includes funds to enable Medicare contractors to reprocess claims for physician services affected by provisions of the Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act passed last spring with a retroactive effective date of January 1, 2010. A more detailed summary of the bill's provisions is attached.

Medicine was supported in its advocacy efforts by aggressive grassroots pressure from AARP, which included over 100,000 contacts by seniors to Congressional offices as well as paid radio and print advertising, direct mail, teletownhalls, and educational efforts conducted jointly with medical societies in several states. Also key to successful and timely passage of the bill was the bipartisan cooperation among leaders in the Senate and the House.

All parties agree with medicine that the time for recurring stop-gap measures to end the disruption caused by the sustainable growth rate formula is long past. As noted in a statement issued yesterday by President Obama: "It's time for a permanent solution that seniors and their doctors can depend on and I look forward to working with Congress to address this matter once and for all in the coming year."

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