

# The Capitol Key

ACP Services' Advocacy Newsletter for Key Contacts

American College of Physicians  
Services, Inc



Key Contact Program

November 2005



## STATUS OF MEDICARE PHYSICIAN PAYMENT CUTS IN CONGRESS

On Nov 3, the Senate passed its federal spending bill that included a 1% Medicare physician update (increase) for 2006 to replace the 4.4% cut expected to go into effect on January 1, 2006. In addition, the bill also included pay-for-reporting starting in 2007, with a 2% reduction in the conversion factor for those who do not report. On Nov 18, the House of Representatives passed its reconciliation bill by a two-vote margin, 217-215. The reconciliation bill saves \$50 billion but, unlike the Senate bill, it contains no Medicare provisions. When Congress returns from its Thanksgiving recess, the House and Senate will each select conferees that will comprise the joint conference committee charged with working out the differences between the two bills. Assuming conferees are able to reach a compromise, the final bill will go back to both the House and Senate for floor votes before the congressional session ends in mid-December. If approved by both bodies, the final bill will be sent to the President for signing.

**HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES, LABOR, AND EDUCATION BILL** was defeated in the House on Nov 17 by a vote of 209-224. The bill proposed funding for FY 2006 for the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), Health Resources and Services Administration Student Loan Programs under Titles VII and VIII of the Public Health Service Act. The House and the Senate will convene a conference committee to negotiate next year's spending levels.

**HEALTH INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY LEGISLATION** "Wired for Health Care Quality Act" S. 1418 was recently approved in the Senate. It is designed to encourage health care providers to adopt information technology and thus improve health care quality. The House introduced similar complementary bills including ACP's endorsed H.R. 747, "National Health Information Incentive Act of 2005". With little time remaining in the current congressional session, passage is not expected until next year.



## TESTIMONY AND LEADERSHIP MEETINGS ON CAPITOL HILL

On November 17, **Vineet Arora, MD**, chair of ACP's Council of Associates, testified to the **House Energy and Commerce's Subcommittee on Health** during its hearing on "Medicare Physician Payment: How to Build a More Efficient Payment System". Dr. Arora eloquently explained that shortages are developing for U.S. physicians, particularly in general internal medicine and family practice, and stressed that the proposed Medicare cuts will only accelerate this decline. She urged the subcommittee to recommend that Congress take action now to help avert the looming crisis in access to primary care.

As part of the "**In Their Own Words**" Campaign, representatives of the College, the American Academy of Family Physicians, and the American Osteopathic Association held meetings Nov 10 with key lawmakers on Capitol Hill to oppose the proposed 4.4% cut in the Medicare fee schedule. College President **C. Anderson Hedberg, MD, FACP**; **Michael Sha, MD**, chair of ACP's Council of Young Physicians; **Deepak Pradhan**, member of ACP's Council of Student Members; and **Fred Ralston, MD, FACP**, chair of ACP's Board of Governors provided first-hand accounts of how the Medicare payment cuts will adversely affect their practices, their patients, and their communities and hand-delivered state-specific stories to each targeted legislator. The three organizations held a joint press conference on Capitol Hill to call attention to the meetings and placed an ad in *Roll Call*, the Capitol Hill newspaper. This campaign also included a daily blast fax for 10 days to all senators and representatives protesting the Medicare cuts and advocating for payment reform. Copies of College faxes that present the arguments against the Medicare cuts and summarize physician "stories" on their impact are online.

[http://www.acponline.org/college/misc/ownwords\\_campaign.htm?hp](http://www.acponline.org/college/misc/ownwords_campaign.htm?hp)

**You are now able to send a fax directly from the  
Legislative Action Center (LAC) website:**

<http://www.acponline.org/hpp/advocacy/index.html#lac>

**WORKING  
FOR YOU ON  
CAPITOL  
HILL**



**By Joseph Stubbs, MD, FACP  
Chair, ACP Services PAC**

Together with ACP Services, lobbyists and key contacts, the PAC is working hard on your behalf to help IM block Medicare pay cuts on Capitol Hill. We elect members of Congress who support our views, including the need to ensure an adequate and reliable Medicare physician payment system that keeps pace with the cost of practicing medicine. The PAC targets its contributions to members of key congressional health committees who will decide within the next few weeks whether or not to halt pending fee cuts and make decisions on other important issues affecting internists and their patients.

Not only does ACP Services PAC ensure that internal medicine's views are heard on Capitol Hill, it also helps our key contacts and state leaders build stronger relationships with their members of Congress back home. Recently, several PAC members attended fundraisers for congressional candidates we support, providing them an opportunity to discuss firsthand how the 4.4% payment cut will adversely affect them, their patients, and their communities.

Last month, former ACP President and ACP Services PAC Member **Sara Walker, MD, FACP**, attended a fundraiser in the district for Rep. Kenny Hulshof (MO) on the PAC's behalf. Hulshof serves on the House Ways and Means Committee, which has jurisdiction over Medicare physician payment issues. ACP Services PAC Board member **Robert Gluckman, MD, FACP**, attended a fundraiser in Portland, Oregon, for his Senator, Gordon Smith, who serves on the Finance Committee, the Senate panel charged with addressing Medicare physician payment issues. And, leaders from the New York chapter, **Paul Davis, MD, MACP**, and **Alwin Steinmann, MD, FACP**, delivered a PAC contribution on Nov 7 to Rep. Michael McNulty, who sits on the Ways and Means Committee.

For more information on the ACP Services PAC and how it is helping internal medicine visit our website at [www.acpservices.org/pac](http://www.acpservices.org/pac) (use your ACP online password to access the website).

**WE STILL NEED YOUR HELP! Contact Congress today to help avert the cuts.** Use the AMA's toll-free grassroots hotline (1-800-833-6354 and enter your zip code when prompted) to call your House of Representatives member. Ask him/her to urge House Speaker Dennis Hastert (R-IL) to include at least two years of relief from the Medicare cuts in any final conference agreement. During the Nov 21-Dec 4 Thanksgiving recess, schedule a meeting in the district with your House and Senate members to discuss the impacts of the Medicare cuts on your practice, your patients, and your community. If you have already contacted your legislators this fall, please call them again. Visit the Legislative Action Center (LAC) for meeting talking points and more information.

<http://www.acponline.org/hpp/advocacy/index.html#lac>

**SPOTLIGHT**

To date, **nearly 7,000 ACP members** have contacted their legislators this fall by email, fax, or phone about the proposed Medicare payment cuts. We can't name everyone here but we sincerely appreciate those who took the time to help halt the cuts. We are also grateful to the **Board of Governors/their reps**, each of whom sent letters on behalf of their chapter to their congressional delegation. Each Governor/rep also submitted opinion-editorial pieces to their local or regional newspapers. So far, 10 op-eds have been published by the following people: **Jay Butler, MA, FAAP, FACP** (Anchorage Dailey News); **Dr. Robert Englund, MD, FACP** (New Hampshire's The Keene Sentinel); **Dr. John Fitzgibbons, MD, FACP** (Pennsylvania's The Morning Call); **Dr. Ray Hall, Jr., MD, FACP** (Arkansas' The Sun); **Dr. Robert Lubitz, MD, MPH, FACP** (Indiana's The News-Sentinel); **Dr. Samuel Peeples, MD, FACP** (Mississippi's The Clarion-Ledger); **Dr. J. Gregory Rosencrane, MD, FACP** (West Virginia's The Register-Herald); **Dr. Ted Sussman, MD, FACP** (Maine's Bangor Daily News); **Dr. Sara Wallach, MD, FACP** (New Jersey's Asbury park Press); **Dr. Anne Winkler, MD, PhD, FACP, FACR** (Missouri's The News-Ledger).



**UPCOMING EVENTS**

**April 5, 2006: State Networking Session, Philadelphia, Pennsylvania**

**May 16-17, 2006: ACP Leadership Day on Capitol Hill, Wyndham Washington, D.C.**

**Questions or Comments**

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