Senate Action on SGR Bill Postponed Until After Recess--Your Engagement Still Needed

After the House passed HR 2 by a substantial majority last Thursday, the bill was sent to the Senate which was tied up in its annual marathon of budget votes. The prolonged voting session on the non-binding Budget Resolution which lasted until 3AM was the final action taken in Congress until the members return April 13.

This means the Senate will take up legislation to replace the sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula and other Medicare issues when it returns from a two-week recess, Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R., Ky.) decided.

With the knowledge of considerable bipartisan support for HR 2 in the House, our PPS advocacy team worked during trying to find senators who were willing to delay and amend the bill. But it appeared headed for “unanimous consent” (with no chance to amend) and ultimately a voice vote. Late Thursday it became clear that (at least) three Republican senators had raised objections, therefore the Majority Leader decided to postpone consideration of the bill until April.

The American Medical Association condemned the Senate for leaving for recess before voting to permanently replace the Medicare SGR formula. But PPS believes the two-week recess provides additional opportunities to include our issues in the bill during Senate deliberations. We will lobby to include the full repeal of the therapy cap as opposed to a two-year extension of the exceptions process included in HR 2. We also hope to position the no-cost locum tenens technical correction (S. 313) for inclusion in this Medicare legislation.

The PPS lobbying team is working with our allies and fellow stakeholders to develop an active strategy for the two-week recess. During this important hiatus our members may be able to communicate with their senators, in person, back in their home state. We would hope you take maximum advantage of these valuable opportunities.

While our efforts in the House did not achieve the optimal results, members should be assured our voices have been heard. Postponement of the bill until April was, at least in part, due to our engagement.

We will therefore be counting on our grassroots members to continue, if not step up, their communications with their senators. This is the time that we, as well as our patients, can make a difference.

Your tireless advocacy is necessary at this time. Keeping up the pressure is the only thing that can result in success.

Thank you.
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