



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS
STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

November 21, 2009

The Honorable Harry Reid
Majority Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Reid:

Thank you for your commitment to the long-term reform of the nation's health care system. The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* that you introduced on Thursday is a valuable part of the process to reach the goal of health care coverage for everyone and contains some valuable investments in transforming our health care system to one based on primary care. We urge the Senate to proceed to debate, so that Congress can finish its work as soon as possible.

The *Patient Protection and Affordable Care Act* is a large and complicated bill, but we have seen most of the provisions at some point during the extensive debates on the issue that have taken place since Sen. Baucus introduced his White Paper last year. The AAFP has not taken a position yet on the substance of your bill, but we know that there cannot be health reform unless the Senate deliberates and has the opportunity to consider improving amendments.

There are several concerns that family physicians have with the legislation that you have introduced. AAFP believes that the Senate must act to repeal the flawed Medicare Sustainable Growth Rate and replace it with a better, fairer, and more predictable system of updating physician payments, as the House of Representatives did when it passed H.R. 3961, the *Medicare Physician Payment Reform Act*. Your legislation's temporary, half percent increase in Medicare payments in lieu of a 21-percent cut from the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) does not provide the permanent solution to the flawed SGR that clearly is required.

We have other concerns, including the make up of the Independent Medicare Advisory Commission that your legislation proposes, the need for additional Congressional oversight of this important body, the exclusion of some sectors of the health system from its reach, and the need for public comment period on IMAC proposals.

We also have expressed concern in the past with the provision to impose penalties on physicians who do not report on quality measures in the Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI) before CMS has had the experience to run the program successfully.

The AAFP and the Academic Family Medicine organizations also are interested in encouraging Congress to invest in testing alternative funding programs for Graduate Medical Education to support the training of

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additional family physicians for the greatly increased demand for primary care that the health reform legislation will produce.

Finally, we are recommending that health reform include substantive reform of the medical liability system. The AAFP has long recommended that Congress provide states with incentives for broader experimentation in successful alternatives to a flawed, ineffective and expensive liability system.

We will have other suggestions for improvement in the days ahead, but the need for health reform is urgent and the Senate should respond accordingly.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Ted Epperly MD". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Ted Epperly, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair