



AMERICAN ACADEMY OF
FAMILY PHYSICIANS
STRONG MEDICINE FOR AMERICA

October 11, 2013

The Honorable John Boehner
Office the Speaker
U. S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi
Office of the Democratic Leader
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

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

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Office of the Republican Leader
U.S. Senate
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Speaker Boehner, Representative Pelosi, Senator Reid and Senator McConnell:

Congress has reached a critical stage in its stewardship of the American economy and federal government and we are encouraged that discussions are underway. However, the nation faces uncertainty and confusion without funding to support the functioning of much of the federal government, with a deadline to extend the government's borrowing authority only a week away and with other critical deadlines, like the Medicare's Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula, looming on the horizon. Congress must act immediately to prevent further economic deterioration. The American Academy of Family Physicians (AAFP), which is comprised of 110,600 family physicians and medical students across the county, implores Congress to take the necessary actions to stabilize the economy and restore the full function of the federal government.

The current partial shutdown of the federal government has deep and lasting effects on the health of our nation. Whether assuring the safety of the nation's food supply, tracking influenza and other illnesses, initiating important clinical trials of life-saving treatments, or promptly processing new applications for Medicare coverage, vital functions of the federal government are delayed or suspended because of this failure to pass appropriations for federal agencies. These and other functions of the federal government have serious consequences and the inability of the government to provide these and other needed health-related services affects lives long after the current impasse is resolved.

A failure to address the federal debt ceiling prior to October 17 would have an additional consequential impact on our nation's health care programs – especially Medicare and Medicaid. The Treasury Secretary yesterday expressed this immediate and negative impact in his testimony to the Senate Finance Committee, when he said:

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“Failing to raise the debt ceiling will impact everyday Americans beyond its impact on financial markets. For example, doctors receiving reimbursements under Medicare would likely continue to provide services on a timely basis, but they would be operating with significant uncertainty about when they would be paid by the government for their services. For millions of low-income Americans who rely on Medicaid for their healthcare, the federal government’s payments to states for the federal contribution would likely also be impacted. These providers still have to pay their doctors, nurses, and staff, but absent timely federal payments, many could face real liquidity challenges.”

A stable economy and fully functioning government are essential to meeting the nation’s obligations and promises to our patients who depend on Medicare or Medicaid for their health care.

Finally, the AAFP believes that part of meeting these obligations requires effective action to prevent dramatic reductions in Medicare payments to those physicians who provide care to Medicare and Medicaid patients. The SGR is symbolic of the long-term budget ramifications created by continuous short-term policy interventions. This is why we continue to urge Congress to repeal the SGR and create a payment system that supports primary care and provides all physicians with the stability and appropriate reimbursement that the current system undermines.

We urge Congress to take the appropriate steps to meet the promises made to stabilize our nation’s economy, restore the federal government to full capacity, and ensure access to physicians’ services by ending the decade-old downward spiral of the SGR.

We offer you the assistance of the AAFP in accomplishing these necessary and important goals. Please contact Kevin Burke, Director of Government Relations, at kburke@aafp.org or by phone at 202-232-9033, if we can be of assistance.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'JC' followed by a long horizontal stroke.

Jeff Cain, MD, FAAFP
Board Chair