

House passes major Medicare improvements

Contributed by Editor
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WASHINGTON — On Tuesday, the House passed legislation that would significantly improve Medicare benefits for 44 million American seniors and people with disabilities.

The bill, which Congressman Mike Thompson helped craft as a member of the Ways and Means Committee, pays particular attention to recipients in areas with limited access to health care.

In addition, the bill includes several provisions championed by Thompson that directly impact the First Congressional District.

“Medicare providers in rural areas like Northern California often lack the resources they need to serve the public,” said Thompson. “This bill increases payments for sole community and critical access hospitals, increases payments for rural ambulance services and ensures physicians are fairly reimbursed for Medicare services.”

Without this legislation, physicians across the country would face a 10.6 percent cut in reimbursements for Medicare services beginning July 1. Alarmingly, the data suggests that over 60 percent of California physicians would leave the Medicare program or stop taking new Medicare patients if these cuts are implemented.

“Although this bill stops cuts to physician payments, it is not about how much we pay doctors,” said Thompson. “This bill is about access to health care for patients. When doctors don’t get reimbursed, they often can’t continue serving Medicare patients.”

The Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act (HR 6331) also includes provisions from Thompson’s telehealth legislation, which expands the types of health facilities that offer telehealth services. Telehealth, the delivery of health services via telecommunications, is a proven method for doctors and patients to effectively communicate from separate locations.

Also included are provisions from Thompson’s cancer prevention bill, expanding the Welcome to Medicare Physical Examination from six months to one year for all new Medicare enrollees. Thompson has been a leading champion for preventive health care since his time in the State Senate, and believes this provision will help millions of Medicare recipients stay healthy.

“Making investments in preventive health care is one of the best ways to keep people healthy and reduce our nation’s health care costs,” added Thompson.

In addition, the bill permanently extends a Thompson-authored law that helps National Guard and Reserve physicians maintain their practices while deployed overseas.

Prior to Thompson’s law, Guard and Reserve physicians would have difficulties arranging other physicians to cover their practices while they were deployed and still get reimbursed for Medicare services; however, this law will expire on July 1. This bill ensures that physicians can continue to serve our country overseas without worrying about losing their medical practice at home.

The Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act now moves to the Senate for consideration.

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