

COOPER TEAMS WITH ROCKEFELLER ON GROUNDBREAKING HEALTH REFORM LEGISLATION

Friday, June 5

MedPAC Reform Act would take politics out of Medicare reimbursement decisions

WASHINGTON--U.S. Congressman Jim Cooper (D-TN) introduced a key health care reform bill designed to take politics out of costly and controversial Medicare reimbursement decisions.

The MedPAC Reform Act of 2009 (H.R. 2718) would convert MedPAC, which is currently the agency that advises Congress on Medicare payment decisions, into an independent executive branch agency modeled after the Federal Reserve. Companion Senate legislation was introduced in May by Senator John D. (Jay) Rockefeller IV.

"Every year, MedPAC advises Congress to reform Medicare, and every year, lobbyists and special interests intervene to stop those reforms in their tracks," said Congressman Cooper, longtime advocate for health care reform. "The government is spending billions of tax dollars on health procedures that don't improve Americans' personal health but do jeopardize our nation's fiscal health. Meanwhile, expert MedPAC reports gather dust on the shelf. We can no longer afford to let politicians keep ignoring these problems when health care professionals have already found the solutions."

"We need to take the politics out of MedPAC, and transition MedPAC into an independent but publicly accountable agency—away from the influence of special interests," said Senator Rockefeller, Chairman of the Senate Finance Subcommittee on Health Care. "I am glad Congressman Cooper is taking the lead on this legislation in the U.S. House of Representatives—it's time for Congress to leave Medicare reimbursement rules to the independent health care experts once and for all."

The MedPAC Reform Act would empower MedPAC, currently an advisory commission made up of 17 health experts, to make binding recommendations to reduce cost and improve quality in Medicare. This week, President Barack Obama voiced support for a similar approach to finding savings in Medicare.

Background:

The Medicare Payment Advisory Commission (MedPAC) is an independent agency established by the Balanced Budget Act of 1997 (P.L. 105-33) to advise the U.S. Congress on issues affecting the Medicare program.

The MedPAC Reform Act of 2009 will work to make Medicare payment decisions more effective and efficient, ensuring that Medicare beneficiaries get the right care at the right time. This legislation will revise MedPAC's mission to:

- Reform MedPAC as Executive Agency Modeled After the Federal Reserve Board;

- Elevate MedPAC to be an independent, executive branch entity, like the Federal Reserve, with the power to implement recommendations that are more insulated from special interests, and more accountable to the American people;

- Inform new research in health services to adequately address deficiencies in the evidence;

- Test new and innovative payment models for provider reimbursement; and

• Expand the capacity to evaluate basic and health services research for reimbursement.

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