

February 15, 2010

The Honorable Saxby Chambliss  
United States Senate  
416 Rayburn Senate Office Building  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Chambliss:

In two weeks, Georgia's 1.1 million Medicare patients and 441,000 TRICARE patients will face reduced access to care and choice of physicians when an automatic 21 percent payment cut to physicians begins. As president of the AMA, joining with the presidents of two large national medical specialty organizations who dedicated their professional lives to caring for Georgia's patients, we are calling on Congress to take immediate, permanent action to repeal the broken Medicare physician payment formula before time runs out.

This year's 21 percent cut is just the tip of the iceberg, with more cuts proposed in years to come. The longer Congress procrastinates by taking the same-old approach of short-term band-aid fixes, the larger the cost of reform and the severity of the cuts grow. Georgia's current and future Medicare patients deserve security and stability in the Medicare program – and repeal of the sustainable growth rate formula (SGR) that projects these steep cuts will preserve the physician foundation of Medicare for seniors.

Seven times in the last seven years, both Democratically-led and Republican-led Congresses have passed legislation to override the broken payment formula that produces annual cuts to physicians caring for Medicare and TRICARE patients. In March 2005, the Congressional Budget Office estimated the cost of a ten-year Medicare physician payment freeze at less than \$50 billion; in May 2009, the estimated cost of a pay freeze had increased more than five-fold.

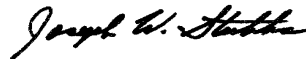
Short-term fixes are neither responsible budget policy nor are they in keeping with our nation's obligations to provide access, choice, and high-quality care to Medicare and TRICARE patients. These band-aid fixes enacted in the past have produced payment rates lagging far behind the rising costs of providing care. In fact, current payment rates are about what they were in 2001, while practice costs continue to rise. To maintain the financial viability of their practices, many of the nearly 19,000 physicians caring for patients in Georgia may find that they must limit access to care for Georgia's seniors, disabled, and military families that rely on Medicare and TRICARE.

This is not a partisan issue, it is a patient issue. We urge you to choose the responsible course and vote for permanently replacing the SGR with a physician payment formula that preserves access to care for our state's seniors, disabled, and military families.

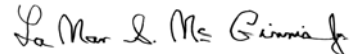
Sincerely,



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