



American Optometric Association

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Mitchell Munson, O.D.
President

December 12, 2013

Dear Colleague:

I want to provide you with a report on the results of optometry's massive grassroots advocacy mobilization over the past 72 hours – a period of fast-breaking health policy developments in the nation's capital, especially with regard to the future of Medicare.

Our efforts were aimed at securing needed changes to two major, committee-level proposals to overhaul the Medicare physician payment system. Both of these bills, and [one other that the AOA had helped shape in July](#), seek to repeal the flawed mechanism that has caused the annual threat of massive Medicare cuts and too-frequent payment disruptions to ODs, MDs and other providers.

From early in the year, to September's [Super Advocacy Conference](#), and the recent [AOA Board meeting in the U.S. Capitol](#), the AOA has made it clear to Congress that our full physician status in Medicare is non-negotiable, and that ODs must continue to be fully recognized partners in developing and participating in physician-level initiatives, such as quality measurement and meaningful use. However, we've seen that certain medical lobbying groups and their backers, including a few extremists among the 20 MDs elected to Congress, want to put their own narrow agenda ahead of what's right for patient care, and they continue desperately trying to define and exclude us.

That's why I'm especially pleased to report to you that our profession was heard loud and clear on Capitol Hill this week, and that we've made significant gains. I want to thank the thousands of AOA doctors and students who acted on the urgent advocacy alerts sent Tuesday night and Wednesday morning from our Washington, D.C. office. In all, about 12,000 AOA members were contacted (because they live or practice in a specially-targeted state or Congressional district). These doctors then lit up the Capitol Hill switchboards as they connected with U.S. Senators and House members to deliver the message about our physician status and the essential care and access which we provide to seniors on a daily basis.

The result is that we have made a compelling case for a significant, optometry-specific change to the Medicare payment bill advancing in the Senate. At the AOA's urging, the legislation was amended this

morning to very clearly affirm that ODs will be fully eligible participants in a newly-created quality care incentive program designed to launch in 2017 as a successor to existing quality improvement efforts and envisioned as the singular pathway for Medicare providers to qualify for larger reimbursements over the next decade. However, it's far too early to even consider claiming victory.

In fact, in spite of all we've done, the House Ways and Means Committee's proposal was not changed in the same way. It is now moving forward, but with a flawed and exclusionary approach toward every Doctor of Optometry and the Medicare patients who rely on us, and it's up to us to see that it's fixed before it can be brought to the House floor for a vote in the early part of next year.

Congress will adjourn shortly and remain in recess into January, providing a fresh opportunity for each of us to meet with our Members of Congress about our role as physicians in Medicare and to lay the groundwork for a final payment overhaul bill that is fair to us and to our patients. Over the next few days, you'll be hearing more through www.aoa.org and our e-newsletter updates about developments on Capitol Hill relating to Medicare and how we will remain a force in the legislative process.

In the meantime, every AOA doctor and student can help advance our profession and become more involved in our advocacy efforts as an [AOA-PAC investor](#) or [AOA Federal Keyperson](#) or by using our [Online Legislative Action Center](#) to connect directly with your lawmakers on this and other important issues. Should you have any questions or need more information, please contact me or Jon Hymes, our Washington Office Director, at 1-800-365-2219 or by [email](#).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Mitchell C. Munson, O.D.".

Mitchell Munson, O.D.

President

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