

Permanent fix to Medicare payment cuts
Senator Sam Brownback
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Every year, Congress must vote on legislation to restore payments to physicians who serve Medicare patients. If Congress fails to pass the legislation, the payments to physicians would be reduced because of a federal law which triggers an automatic payment reduction to physicians.

Not only that, but the rates of payments are based on a woefully outdated formula and do not adequately compensate Medicare providers. This formula is so ineffective that it actually dissuades some Kansas providers from accepting more Medicare patients into their practice.

This Congress, my colleagues and I passed twenty-eight annual extensions of various “must-pass” items. However, this year, in an unprecedented move, the Democrat majority played partisan games with the restoration of Medicare payments to providers.

The Medicare payment system clearly needs to be updated, and ultimately, we must ask ourselves, why isn't the formula to pay Medicare providers permanently fixed? If not for the sake of process, then for the sake of Kansas Medicare beneficiaries and providers, who must wait for Congress to act year after year or face the consequence of having restricted access to care for Medicare patients.

Congress can permanently fix this problem. The Congressional Budget Office has said that if Congress wants to permanently fix the flawed Medicare payment system, it will cost \$288 billion over ten-years. Unless this amount is offset by either spending cuts or permanent tax increases, a super-majority vote of sixty senators is required to pass such a fix.

Here is where we come to an impasse. The Democrat majority is unwilling to cut spending for lower-priority programs to pay for the permanent Medicare fix; Republicans are unwilling to permanently increase taxes to pay for the fix. Thus, we find ourselves in the current state of affairs, and the quality of Medicare patients' health care is suffering.

Therefore, I am proposing that the Senate's spending rules to be set aside in order that we can have an up-or-down vote, requiring a simple majority or 51 members, on which members can vote their conscience to permanently extend 2008 law, thereby permanently fixing the Medicare physician payment formula.

I recognize that this would be an extraordinary move, but then, isn't it extraordinary for Congress to leave America's seniors and their health care providers in a state of anxiety?

We owe this much to Kansas Medicare providers who serve our seniors, so that they will not have to wring their hands with worry every time Congress delays action. Just as

importantly, we owe it to Kansas seniors so that they may be secure in knowing that they will have the top quality health care available.