



For Immediate Release
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**MEDICARE CUTS STOPPED FOR NOW,
CRISIS STILL LOOMS**

Statement attributable to: Russell C. Klein, MD
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The voices of patients and their physicians were heard loud and clear this week, with Congress' overwhelming vote to override a presidential veto and stop impending Medicare payment cuts to physicians. This vote assures continued access to vital health care services for Louisiana's senior citizens. The tremendous public response to stop the cuts is greatly appreciated, and was a major factor in influencing Congress to do the right thing.

Unfortunately, congressional action this week does not address numerous flaws in the federal formula used to calculate physician payments for Medicare services. This reprieve is only a short-term fix for a complex issue, not a real solution. For several years, this formula has calculated reductions in payments in the face of continually rising operating costs in physician practices. The payment formula now projects over a 20 percent reduction in payments beginning January 1, 2010. This will create a literal meltdown of the Medicare program as we know it.

Congress has created an 18 month window of time in which they can resolve the problems inherent in the current physician reimbursement formula. In the months ahead, we must continue to press the message used to stop the 2008 Medicare cuts to bring about congressional action to change the formula. Eliminating the inequities of the formula is the only way to end the annual threat of drastic cuts crippling or shutting down access to Medicare services.

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