



November 17, 2008

Honorable Max Baucus  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Baucus:

The American College of Physicians (ACP), representing more than 126,000 physicians specializing in internal medicine and medical students, congratulates you on your health reform plan, "Call to Action, Health Reform 2009." ACP commends you for your leadership in moving forward to address our country's health care system, an area in which national reforms are long overdue.

We are pleased that you share a number of goals of the highest priority for ACP, among them access to affordable health insurance coverage for all that would include tax credits and subsidies for low-income persons, purchasing pools based on the model of the Federal Employees Health Benefit Plan (FEHBP), insurance market reforms and requirements that large employers offer coverage or pay into the system.

The College is especially pleased that you are continuing to strongly support primary care as, in your words, "the keystone of a high performance health care system." ACP is fully in agreement with the need for reforms that will boost access to this segment of the delivery system. The primary care field is facing an imminent shortage of physicians trained in general internal medicine, family medicine and pediatrics. Enhancing primary care has been shown to improve outcomes and reduce costs. We strongly support the measures in your proposal that would strengthen seniors' access to primary care by improving Medicare payment for these services and by further expanding the patient centered medical home (PCMH). We agree that the improvements in payment for primary care services should not increase Medicare baseline spending, i.e., spending on Parts A, B, C, and D combined. Given the evidence that primary care is associated with fewer hospital admissions and lower overall Medicare utilization, funding for improved payment for primary care services might appropriately take into account the impact of primary care on reducing total Medicare baseline expenditures including Part A expenses.

ACP also applauds your commitment to replacing the system for calculating updates to the Medicare physician fee schedule, now based on the seriously flawed SGR formula. That step alone will go a long way toward assuring America's seniors will enjoy access to physician services as the population continues to age.

Thank you for taking the initiative on reforming health care, Senator Baucus. ACP looks forward to working with you on these vital issues for our nation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jeffrey P. Harris".

Jeffrey P. Harris, MD, FACP  
President