

# Congressmen Aim for 18-Month Physician Fee Fix

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WASHINGTON — Several members of Congress who spoke at a medical specialty conference said they were hopeful that their colleagues would enact legislation quickly to increase physician fees for at least 18 months.

The current legislation, enacted at the end of last year, is due to expire in June. The 6-month fix was a slap in the face to physicians, said Rep. Mike Burgess (R-Tex.).

“What an insult,” said Rep. Burgess, who is an ob.gyn. He introduced a bill last month to reset the sustainable growth rate formula baseline to the year of 2007 and to eliminate it in 2010. The bill, H.R. 5545, would also improve incentives for e-prescribing and for participation in the Physicians Quality Reporting Initiative. At press time, the bill had no cosponsors. It had been referred to the House Ways and Means Committee and the House Energy and Commerce Committee.

Rep. Bart Gordon (R-Tenn.), a senior member of the Energy and Commerce Health Subcommittee, said he was hopeful that corrective legislation would be passed, including a fee increase through 2009. By then, there will be a new presi-

dent and a new Congress, providing a fresh perspective on how to get away from the sustainable growth rate target that’s been ruling Medicare physician pay, he said at the meeting sponsored by the American Academy of Otolaryngology–Head and Neck Surgery.

The Ways and Means Health Subcommittee chairman, Rep. Pete Stark (D-Calif.), seemed less sanguine about quick action this year. However, he pointed out that the Senate had promised to have a bill

by April. The most likely scenario is a reimbursement fix that follows the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission’s recommendation of a 1%-2% increase over the next few years, he said.

The next 4-6 years will be incredibly exciting for the health reform movement, Rep. Stark said.

Rep. Tom Price (R-Ga.), a physician and fellow of the American College of Surgeons, agreed with Rep. Stark that the next few years would be significant.

“The next few years will be pivotal to the future of American medicine,” Rep. Price told meeting attendees.

He introduced a bill in mid-February (H.R. 5445) to increase physician fees by 1% for the remainder of 2008, and 1.8% for 2009.

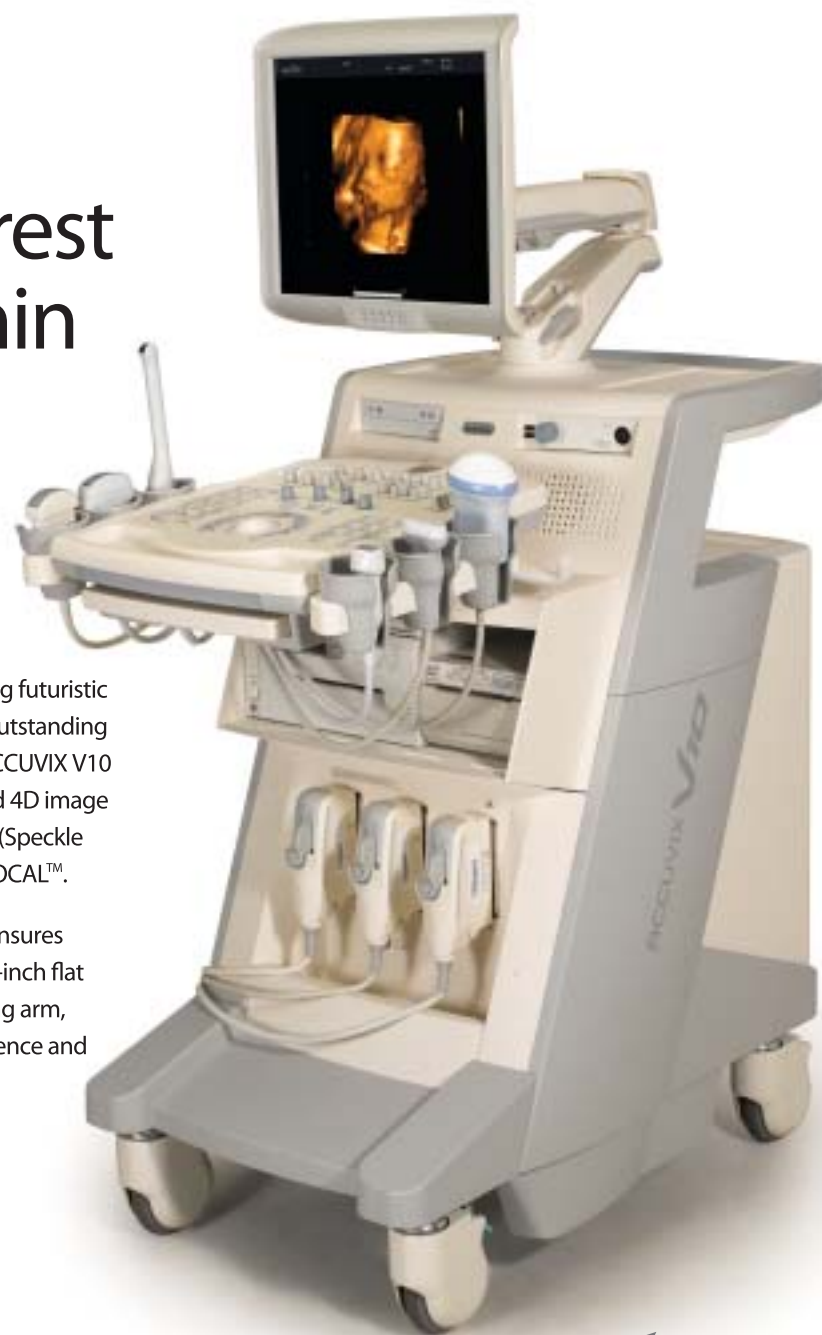
That bill was referred to the Ways and Means Committee and to the Energy and Commerce Committee. At press time, the bill had approximately two dozen cosponsors. ■

## INDEX OF ADVERTISERS

<b>Arkadia</b> Corporate	8
<b>Astellas Pharma US, Inc. &amp; GlaxoSmithKline</b> VESIcare	5-6
<b>Bayer HealthCare Pharmaceuticals Inc.</b> Mirena	3-4
<b>Conceptus Incorporated</b> Essure	32
<b>CooperSurgical, Inc.</b> Mityvac and Mystic Sperm Select	19 37
<b>CSL Behring LLC</b> Rhophylac	9-10
<b>Cryo-Cell International, Inc.</b> Corporate	18
<b>Duramed Pharmaceuticals, Inc.</b> (a subsidiary of Barr Pharmaceuticals) ParaGard Enjuvia	22a-22b 35-36
<b>Graceway Pharmaceuticals, LLC</b> Aldara	13-15
<b>Hologic</b> ThinPrep	17
<b>Medison America, Inc.</b> Accuvix V10	39
<b>National Down Syndrome Congress</b> Corporate	33
<b>Novo Nordisk Inc.</b> Vagifem	29-30
<b>Quigen, Inc.</b> HPV Test	38
<b>Sciele Pharma, Inc.</b> Prenate DHA	11-12
<b>SonoSite, Inc.</b> Ultrasound	21
<b>Sound Surgical Technologies</b> VASER LIPO	28
<b>Ther-Rx Corporation</b> Evamist Gynazole	24-27 30a-30b
<b>Wyeth Consumer Healthcare</b> Caltrate	52

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