

that imaging grew at twice the rate of all other physician fee schedule services between 1999 and 2003. During that time, MRI and CT procedures increased by 15 to 20 percent per year on their own.

In addition to rising costs, MedPAC further reinforced ongoing concerns about potential overuse of imaging services and the sudden increase of outpatient-based imaging in primary care settings. Citing a lack of training and implementation of imaging guidelines, MedPAC called upon Congress to direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to define and execute such standards.

Given the MedPAC report, imaging reimbursement became an easy budget target during the reconciliation debate in 2005. On January 1, 2007, as directed by the DRA, payments for medical imaging services delivered in a physician's office or imaging center were capped at a rate not to exceed the rate paid to a hospital's outpatient department. In some instances, this has resulted in a 30-50 percent reduction from previous Medicare imaging reimbursement rates and has created questions as to the long-term availability of these vital services for Medicare recipients.

I believe the \$8 billion in imaging cuts were prematurely added to the Deficit Reduction Act in order to meet a budget target and were not based on sound public policy. These cuts represent almost a third of the total savings included in the Deficit Reduction Act, yet they were never debated by Congress. Physicians need imaging technology to ensure the best possible health outcomes for their patients, and they deserve to be fairly compensated for providing their patients access to this revolutionary technology.

The legislation that I am proposing today along with Senators SMITH, KENNEDY, COLLINS, MURRAY, ISAKSON, KOHL, COLEMAN, CASEY, CORNYN, MENENDEZ, BURR, LINCOLN, GRAHAM and HARKIN would declare a 2-year moratorium on the imaging cuts included in the DRA so that both the Government Accountability Office and Congress can better assess what payment or policy reforms are necessary to maximize the effectiveness of the imaging technology available to Medicare recipients. The insight garnered from a comprehensive GAO study will be invaluable to Congress. In the meantime, however, we cannot stand by and allow our elderly and disabled to suffer so that we can meet an arbitrary budget target. I urge my colleagues to join with us in supporting this timely legislation.

Mr. President, I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the RECORD.

There being no objection, the text of the bill was ordered to be printed in the RECORD, as follows:

S. 1338

Be it enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives of the United States of America in Congress assembled,

SECTION 1. SHORT TITLE.

This Act may be cited as the "Access to Medicare Imaging Act of 2007".

SEC. 2. TWO-YEAR MORATORIUM ON CERTAIN MEDICARE PHYSICIAN PAYMENT REDUCTIONS FOR IMAGING SERVICES.

(a) MORATORIUM.—No payment adjustment shall be made under subsections (b)(4)(A) or (c)(2)(B)(v)(II) of section 1848 of the Social Security Act (42 U.S.C. 1395w-4) during the 2-year period beginning on the date of the enactment of this Act.

(b) GAO STUDY AND REPORT ON IMAGING SERVICES FURNISHED UNDER THE MEDICARE PROGRAM.—

(1) STUDY.—The Comptroller General of the United States shall conduct a comprehensive study on imaging services furnished under the Medicare program.

(2) REPORT.—Not later than 1 year after the date of enactment of this Act, the Comptroller General shall submit to Congress and the Secretary of Health and Human Services a report on the findings and conclusions of the study conducted under paragraph (1) together with recommendations for such legislation and administrative actions as the Comptroller General considers appropriate.

By Mr. REID (for Mr. KENNEDY for himself, Mr. DURBIN, and Mr. KERRY):

S. 1339. A bill to amend the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, the Higher Education Act of 1965, and the Internal Revenue Code of 1986 to improve recruitment, preparation, distribution, and retention of public elementary and secondary school teachers and principals, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Finance.

Mr. KENNEDY. Mr. President, of all the challenges we face today, one of the most important is creating greater opportunities for the Nation's children to learn and succeed in life. If America is to remain competitive in the global economy, if all Americans are to have access to the American dream, we must ensure that all our children receive a good education.

A good education begins with a good teacher. One of the most significant steps we can take to improve the Nation's schools is to do more to support the recruitment, training, and retention of high quality teachers.

We owe a great debt to America's teachers. Day in and day out, in thousands of schools across the country, they struggle to give our children the knowledge and skills they need to succeed. Our teachers are at the forefront of the constant effort to improve public education. It is their vision, energy, hard work, and dedication that will make all the difference in successfully meeting this challenge.

As Shirley Hufstедler, the Nation's first Secretary of Education, said:

"The role of the teacher remains the highest calling of a free people. To the teacher, America entrusts her most precious resource, her children; and asks that they be prepared, in all their glorious diversity, to face the rigors of individual participation in a democratic society."

All children need and deserve teachers who can help them succeed. We in Congress must do all in our power to help them do so.

We took a major step toward this goal when Congress passed the No

Child Left Behind Act, which recognized that all students deserve first-rate teachers to help them reach their potential in school. The law established a goal to guarantee a highly qualified teacher in every classroom by the end of 2006. Few states have reached that ambitious target, and much more remains to be done to achieve success.

Extensive research shows that teacher quality is the most important educational factor affecting student achievement. One recent study showed that having a highly qualified teacher can improve student academic growth by as much as one full year. Another showed that students taught by highly qualified teachers for 3 consecutive years significantly outperformed their peers on academic assessments. A comparison of low-performing and high-performing elementary schools with similar student populations found that differences in teacher qualifications accounted for 90 percent of the difference in performance in reading and math. There's strong evidence that a good teacher can make all the difference in closing achievement gaps for the neediest students in our public schools.

Investing in teacher quality is cost effective and fiscally responsible. A recent study involving 1,000 school districts found that additional dollars invested in more highly qualified teachers resulted in greater improvements in student achievement than any other use of school resources.

Unfortunately, research also shows that high quality teachers are the most inequitably distributed educational resource in the Nation. The most at-risk students are too often taught by the least prepared, least experienced, and least qualified teachers. Students in high poverty schools are twice as likely to be taught by teachers with less than 3 years of experience. Such teachers are less likely to receive the resources and support they need to succeed. Often they leave the profession and further destabilize already struggling schools. By contrast, children of the affluent and the privileged are much more likely to be taught by highly prepared and qualified, expert teachers with broad knowledge and experience in the subjects they teach.

To enable more teachers to receive the assistance they need to improve their instruction, ensure that every child receives a high quality education, and level the playing field for America's students, Congress must act on a comprehensive plan to build and sustain a strong teacher workforce.

That is why today I am introducing the Teacher Excellence for All Children Act of 2007, the TEACH Act. Its purpose is to assist the States and districts in better recruiting, training, retaining and supporting our teachers. Our distinguished colleague in the House, Congressman GEORGE MILLER, is introducing companion legislation, and I commend him for his leadership on this issue.