BUDGET DEAL INCLUDES RADIATION ONCOLOGY PROVISION

The Bipartisan Budget Act that Congress passed last week to avert the government shutdown included a provision to extend transitional payment rules for radiation therapy services under the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule through 2019. ASTRO advocated aggressively to extend the expiring Patient Access and Medicare Protection Act (PAMPA) payment freeze for treatment delivery and image guidance codes until 2019. The extension would maintain payment stability and allow sufficient time for implementing a Radiation Oncology Alternative Payment Model.

The legislation also includes four additional years of funding for the Children’s Health Insurance Program; funding for community health centers, teaching health centers and the National Health Service Corps; repeal of the therapy caps; a delay of the Medicaid Disproportionate Share Hospital pay cuts and funding for other so-called Medicare extenders.

Health care offsets in the bill include a provision to cut in half the annual payment update physicians receive from Medicare. The provision reduces the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule conversion factor for 2019 from 0.5 percent to 0.25 percent, which impacts all Medicare providers.