Provider lobbyists say they are optimistic that the Senate will pass the House bill to replace the Sustainable Growth Rate (SGR) formula upon return from recess.

Shortly before the House overwhelmingly passed H.R. 2 on March 26th, Senators Ben Sasse (R-NE) and Jeff Sessions (R-AL) began slowing the bill’s momentum because they oppose not paying for it. The bill is about one-third offset. Sessions said the Senate should temporarily override looming physician pay cuts that the SGR formula calls for and negotiate a bill that is fully offset. Sasse wrote an op-ed in Politico arguing that the Senate should scrap the House deal because it misses an opportunity to overhaul Medicare.

House leaders from both parties, who negotiated the SGR bill, hoped senators would vote for the SGR bill after the Senate's marathon of voting on budget amendments. To make it difficult for the Senate to amend the SGR replacement bill, the House recessed after passing it and refused to patch SGR.

Although the 21 percent Medicare pay cut for physician services officially began April 1st, CMS is holding claims to give Congress time to pass the bill when they return from their two-week recess on April 13. Typically, the agency may hold claims for 10 business days, which would give Congress two days to pass the bill.

Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-NV) and Majority Leader Mitch McConnell (R-KY) are discussing a very limited number of amendments with time agreements on them. McConnell later added that “we’ll be able to figure a way to go forward very quickly... I believe it's going to pass the Senate by a very large majority.” President Obama has already signaled his intention to sign the bipartisan bill.