



Welcome to the Thanksgiving edition of the AMA's Very Influential Physician (VIP) Insider. Read on for details about these topics:

- Tell Congress to cancel the cut!
- Physician organizations support draft budget neutrality legislation from Doctors Caucus leadership
- The Congressional retirement flood
- Moving constituents up the advocacy engagement ladder\

Tell Congress to cancel the cut!

As you well know, the flawed Medicare physician payment system is in desperate need of fixing and unfortunately things are about to get worse.

Recently the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services (CMS) announced final plans for payment schedules for physicians and spoiler alert, it's not good! CMS approved a 3.4% reduction in Medicare's physician payments for 2024.

That means if Congress doesn't act before the end of the year, these proposed cuts will go into effect and patient access to care will be negatively impacted. These cuts could disproportionately affect small, independent, and rural physician practices, as well as those treating low-income or other historically minoritized or marginalized patient communities.

[Congress needs to act NOW – tell your legislators to fix the flawed Medicare physician payment system and cancel the cut!](#)

To make matters worse, physicians are the only Medicare providers whose payments do not automatically receive an annual inflationary update, which means they will not receive a 4.6% Medicare Economic Index (MEI) update in 2024. In fact, since 2001, Medicare physician payments have lagged 26% behind the rate of inflation!

Sadly, America's patients are the ones who will suffer the most with worse access to care and fewer physicians accepting Medicare patients.

Everyone agrees the Medicare physician payment system is broken, and it's time for Congress to do something about it - [Please contact your Representative and Senators and urge them to cancel the cut today!](#)

Physician organizations support draft budget neutrality legislation from Doctors Caucus leadership

The AMA—alongside 121 national medical specialty societies and state medical associations—sent a letter (PDF) to GOP Doctors Caucus co-chairs, Representatives Brad Wenstrup (R-OH), Greg Murphy (R-NC) and Michael Burgess (R-TX), thanking them for their leadership in introducing draft legislation to reform budget neutrality policies applied to the Medicare Physician Fee Schedule.

The discussion draft's provisions offer practical policy improvements that would add crucial stability and predictability to Medicare physician payments. These provisions include:

- Providing the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services (CMS) with the ability to reconcile inaccurate utilization projections based on actual claims.
- Raising the budget neutrality threshold from \$20 million to \$53 million and increasing it every five years by the cumulative increase in MEI.
- Requiring the Secretary to limit positive or negative budget neutrality adjustments to the conversion factor to 2.5% each year.

The Congressional retirement flood

[By J. Miles Coleman](#)

How Manchin, Spanberger, and other recent candidate declarations have (or have not) changed the competitive landscape.

When the holiday season starts to approach during the odd-numbered years, that can only mean one thing for political nerds: congressional retirement watch.

As members shift from legislating to thinking about spending time with their families, Thanksgiving time is often when retirement announcements start to ramp up. The current cycle seems to fit nicely into that historical pattern. With several retirement announcements coming just within the past week or so, we thought we'd take stock of the landscape.

Last week, one of the bigger announcements came from the Senate side of Capitol Hill: Sen. Joe Manchin (D-WV) ruled out running for a third full term. The *Crystal Ball* already had Manchin, a moderate Democrat who is now a political anomaly in his ruby red state, as an underdog. But now, Republicans have an even better chance to win Manchin's seat for the first time since the 1950s (the late Democratic Sen. Robert Byrd occupied this seat for much of that time).

When Manchin was first elected to the Senate in 2010, West Virginia was still very amenable to down-ballot Democrats. Republicans, meanwhile, did not have much of a bench in the state and ran wealthy businessman John Raese, who was something of a perennial candidate — before his bouts with Manchin, he had lost races to Democratic Sens. Jay Rockefeller and Byrd. While Manchin entered that 2010 race as one of the most popular governors in the country, he had to sweat a bit during the campaign but ultimately won by a comfortable 53%-43%. In 2012, Manchin faced a rematch with Raese, but perhaps dissuaded by the 2010 result, national Republicans did not seriously target the race.

Though Manchin won by a landslide 24-point margin in 2012, the state's presidential vote would set the tone for the rest of the decade. Up the ballot, Mitt Romney won West Virginia by an even bigger 27-point margin and became the first presidential nominee to sweep all 55 counties. While Romney's strength was surprising at the time, his showing represented a "new normal" for the state in presidential elections — Democrats have not carried any counties there since then and have lost the state by even more lopsided margins.

Manchin's 2018 reelection was what one Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee contact described to us as the committee's "most impressive" work of that cycle. While Manchin was able to secure a second full term, there were some stars that had to align. Although then-President Donald Trump was popular in West Virginia and made multiple midterm campaign trips to the state, Manchin at least did not have to run with an unpopular Democratic president, something that helped sink several red state Democrats in the 2010 and 2014 midterms.

Republicans also likely did Manchin a favor in 2018 by passing over their arguably strongest candidate, then-Rep. Evan Jenkins (R, WV-3), in favor of nominating state Attorney General Patrick Morrisey (who is seeking the state's open governorship this cycle). As Manchin defeated Morrisey by just over 3 points, it was clear that his coalition was becoming more nationalized: in Charleston's Kanawha County, the most populous county in the state, he about matched his 2012 showing but became the first Democrat in generations to win without several traditionally blue coalfields counties.

This brings us to 2024. If Manchin tried to forge ahead with a reelection campaign, many of the factors that had aided him in past races would have been absent. As we have mentioned repeatedly, with Senate races falling increasingly along presidential lines, the type of crossover support he got in his 2012 effort seems like a pipe dream today. We don't doubt that Manchin would run considerably ahead of Biden, but closing the 35 to 40 point deficit would make for an extremely difficult assignment in the context of modern federal elections.

In 2024, Manchin likely would not have been helped by weak GOP opposition, either. Earlier this year, national Republicans got their ideal recruit in party-switching Gov. Jim Justice, who will be termed out of his current job next year (a Republican for most of his life, Justice ran for office as a Democrat in 2016 then rejoined the GOP a year later). The only other major name in the GOP primary is Rep. Alex Mooney (R, WV-2), who is more of a favorite among grassroots and activist conservatives. But Trump endorsed Justice last month, and with Manchin out, the governor seems to have a clear path to the Senate. So with that in mind, we are moving our rating for West Virginia's contest from Leans Republican to Safe Republican (we announced the decision on social media when Manchin made his announcement last week, but it is such an important development that we did not want to just gloss over it).

Considering his centrist tendencies, Manchin has repeatedly come up as a potential third party presidential candidate. In his retirement announcement video, he did not exactly dispel those rumors, although fellow retiring Sen. Mitt Romney (R-UT), who has been viewed as Manchin's most likely ticket mate in such an effort, appears uninterested in a national third party run.

With Manchin's departure, the biggest question mark hanging over the 2024 Senate landscape, at least from a candidate recruitment standpoint, is what Sen. Kyrsten Sinema (I-AZ) will do. Rep. Ruben Gallego (D, AZ-3) is almost the de facto Democratic nominee while

Kari Lake, the GOP's election-denying 2022 gubernatorial nominee, is a favorite for the GOP nod. We think that Sinema really doesn't have a path to victory as an independent, but she could at least siphon off a not-insignificant share of votes. National Republican Senatorial Committee Chairman Steve Daines (R-MT) reportedly has polling showing Sinema pulling more Republicans than Democrats, but basically every scenario of this race that we've seen points to a competitive race.

Meanwhile, Republicans have at least one clear pickup — West Virginia — and only need to flip one other seat to win 51 Senate seats (for an outright majority next year), assuming they defend all of their current seats. The GOP's most obvious other targets remain Sens. Jon Tester (D-MT) and Sherrod Brown (D-OH) in Toss-up races.

[Continue reading](#)

Moving constituents up the advocacy engagement ladder

Our partners at the Congressional Management Foundation (CMF) wanted to identify advocacy tactics that help Members of Congress to understand their constituents' perspective. CMF asked congressional staff the following question:

"In your opinion, how important is each for understanding constituents' views and opinions?"

They learned that citizen advocates are much more effective when they **show up and get personal**. While form email is at the bottom of the advocacy engagement ladder (with just 2% of congressional staff agreeing that it is "very important"), attending in-person town hall meetings (36%), sending PERSONALIZED messages (49%), attending events in the district/state (67%), and meeting face to face with staff (71%) and Members of Congress (74%) are very effective advocacy tactics that citizen advocates should use. Advocacy organizations should encourage their supporters to climb the advocacy engagement ladder.

Source: Partnership for a More Perfect Union, Copyright Congressional Management Foundation, <http://CongressFoundation.org>. Used with permission.

DECEMBER

SUN	MON	TUE	WED	THU	FRI	SAT
					1	2
3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10	11	12	13	14	15	16
17	18	19	20	21	22	23
24	25 Christmas Day	26	27	28	29	30
31						

AMA Events
Senate in Session
House in Session
Both Chambers in Session

State Work Periods
District Work Periods
Both Work Periods

Be sure to follow all the AMA's Physician Grassroots Network social media accounts for all the latest news on physician advocacy and what you can do to make sure your voice is heard on Capitol Hill.



[AMA Advocacy](#)



25 Massachusetts Ave. NW | Suite 600 | Washington, DC 20001

Copyright © 2023, American Medical Association

If you no longer wish to receive our emails, please [unsub]