

Letter sent to all Senators



September 27, 2004

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
United States Senate
361A Russell Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator McConnell:

On behalf of the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) and the American Medical Association (AMA), we are writing to urge your support of S. 2484, as amended, the "Department of Veterans Affairs Health Care Personnel Enhancement Act of 2004," also known as the VA Physician Pay Bill. Passage of this bipartisan legislation will improve the ability of the VA to recruit and retain the best and brightest physicians to meet the needs of the nation's veterans through access to the latest clinical research and cutting-edge technologies, as well as an enhanced academic environment.

The compensation system for VA physicians has not been updated since 1991, and does not provide the needed flexibility to respond to changing market conditions, especially for the highest paid subspecialties. Current VA physicians are eligible for the federal employee cost-of-living increases only on the base pay portion of their salary. This does not reflect the reality that health care salaries have increased faster than the rest of the economy, and compounds VA's inability to compete with the private and academic sectors for many critical specialties and subspecialties, especially those where the pay disparities are most extreme. Additionally, the current system provides no incentives for VA physicians to take on increasingly complex and responsible assignments. The system is in serious need of reform to provide the long-term viability and competitive compensation required of a first-class health care system.

Passage of a new, rational compensation system for VA physicians will go a long way toward improving the ability of the VA to recruit and retain top quality physicians and provide first-rate care to the nation's veterans. For these reasons, the AAMC and the AMA urge you to support this important legislation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jordan J. Cohen'.

Jordan J. Cohen, M.D.
President
Association of American Medical Colleges

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Michael D. Maves'.

Michael D. Maves, M.D.
Executive Vice President and CEO
American Medical Association