

Coburn's justification for striking the language that would finally result in fair pay for California doctors, language originally authored by Congressman Sam Farr (D-Carmel), relies on a series of errors and misstatements, displaying a clear misunderstanding of the complex issue.

False claim: The provision "creates a new way of calculating payments."

Fact: The fix included in H.R. 4213 uses the exact same formula currently in existence, it merely instructs the Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services to correctly categorize counties as "rural" or "urban" using well-defined and established Metropolitan Statistical Area data. CMS for decades has failed to update those designations, which has resulted in seniors being unable to find a doctor who accept Medicare patients and hospitals having difficulties recruiting doctors.

False claim: Sen. Coburn says House Republicans didn't fight this provision because they "had to focus on the larger issue."

Fact: Support for Rep. Farr's solution to this problem has always been bipartisan. His legislation along with letters sent to CMS have never been limited to Democrats. In addition, of the 24 Member of Congress who represent affected counties, 12 are Democrats and 12 are Republicans.

False claim: The section applies to "rural areas" that "have now become exurbs of larger metro areas."

Fact: San Diego is not a rural area, and it's not an exurb of a larger metropolitan area. Neither is Sacramento. Neither is Monterey. Neither is Riverside. Sen. Coburn's claim that these are still rural areas that are merely distant suburbs illustrates his lack of understanding of California or of the problem that Rep. Farr is trying to fix.

False claim: The provision "gives the entire state of California special treatment."

Fact: Only 15 of California's 58 counties would see increased reimbursements. As the discrepancy continues to widen and more doctors refuse to take new Medicare patients, more seniors will be put at risk and more hospitals will have trouble recruiting doctors, impacting health care for entire communities.

False claim: "What about physicians in Nevada? Or Iowa? Or Oklahoma?"

Fact: There are 16 states facing the same problem with their Geographic Practice Cost Indices, of which Nevada, Iowa and Sen. Coburn's Oklahoma are **not** included. These errors show that Sen. Coburn and his staff have failed to read any of the four nonpartisan studies conducted on this issue which support this fix. Of the 16 states facing the reimbursement error, California accounts for half of the total payment problem nationwide.

False claim: "Why should physicians in California get special treatment?"

Fact: The provision is not "special treatment," it repairs a flaw that results in a particular group of doctors being significantly underpaid. In the past, CMS has refused to correct this problem administratively for fear of lawsuits and oversight problems. Using California, where doctors experience the majority of the problem, as a pilot state, it will ease the process of CMS rolling the fix out to the other 15 states.

False claim: Sen. Coburn characterizes the language as "paying rural physicians in California more than they currently receive."

Fact: Setting aside the fact that these doctors aren't rural-a fact that was proved in studies by the Government Accountability Office, the Urban Institute, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission and Acumen-it's surprising that Sen. Coburn isn't interested in a level playing field for all doctors. Rep. Farr, along with the Republican and Democratic cosponsors of the legislation on which this language is based, are interested in accurate reimbursement and fair access to health care for seniors.

Specious claim: "This phenomenon exists in many other states such as Virginia and Illinois. The challenge is not unique to California-and the solution should not be targeted to California alone either."

Fact: Sen. Coburn finally gets one right: Illinois is affected by this problem. Virginia, however, is not. The problem in this claim lies here: Sen. Coburn is the one standing in the way of this solution being expanded to doctors nationwide. If he was truly interested in fairness, his amendment would have requested that the fix be applied to all 16 states to ensure fairness, but instead he attaches a cute name to the provision to attract media attention.

The provision Sen. Coburn is attacking is Section 522 in H.R. 4213, the America Jobs and Closing Tax Loopholes Act.

For more information on the GPCI issue and Rep. Farr's legislation to fix it, view this June 2009 press release:

http://www.farr.house.gov/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=548

###