

Part B Insider (Multispecialty) Coding Alert

REIMBURSEMENT: President's Proposed Budget Would Slash Future Medicare Funds

But House Dems pledge to fight the bill when it hits the Congress floor

If **President Bush** has his way, he'll give Medicare a cash advance in 2009, and then take money off the table over the subsequent five years.

During his recent State of the Union address, the president told the nation, "Everyone in this chamber knows that spending on entitlement programs like Social Security, Medicare and Medicaid is growing faster than we can afford," setting policymakers up for potential cuts. And this week, President Bush did just that when he introduced his \$3.1 trillion budget, which adds funds to Medicare for 2009, but proposes funding cuts of \$183 billion from the Medicare program over the next five years, according to a Feb. 4 statement by **HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt**.

Bush's current 2009 budget includes a \$29 billion increase in Medicare funds over what was in Medicare's 2008 coffers, but that's no consolation to those who oppose the future cuts.

"While health care costs soar, millions of Americans remain uninsured and as baby boomers approach retirement, the last thing this nation needs is more of the same from the Bush administration," said **Barbara B. Kennelly**, president of the **National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare**, in a Feb. 4 statement. "Proposing \$178 billion in Medicare cuts which will directly impact healthcare access for millions of seniors, while at the same time preserving \$150 billion in insurance industry giveaways, is outrageous and indefensible," she said.

House Democrats have already declared the budget "dead on arrival," vowing to fight the cuts. "President Bush's budget would endanger the health care of America's seniors, people with disabilities, and low-income children," said Pete Stark (D-Calif.), chairman of the House Ways and Means Committee, in a Jan. 31 statement. "These proposed cuts show his single-minded focus on starving popular and effective public programs, while protecting fat cat insurance companies that are overpaid with taxpayer dollars," Stark noted.

Keep an eye on the Insider for more information as the budget heads to the House floor.