

# Dateline|Washington

*prepared by the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy*

## **ACS alerts Senate to workforce crisis**

On February 12, the American College of Surgeons submitted a statement to the U.S. Senate Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions Committee regarding the surgical workforce crisis in this nation and its effects on patient care. In its comments, the College detailed the numerous studies at the national and state levels that point to dangerous shortages in the surgical workforce and recommended a course of action for Congress. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) noted that the dearth of general surgeons in Alaska has become a matter of public concern. Confirming Senator Murkowski's claims was Beth Landon, director, Alaska Center for Rural Health. In addition, John E. Maupin, Jr., president of the Morehouse School of Medicine in Atlanta, GA, said the lack of general surgeons is becoming extremely critical in his state. To view the College's statement, go to <http://www.facs.org/ahp/views/workforce.html>.

## **House passes GME bill**

On February 7, the U.S. House of Representatives passed H.R. 4134, the College Opportunity and Affordability Act of 2007, which re-authorizes the Higher Education Act through 2012. This bill contains several provisions pertaining to graduate medical education (GME), that the ACS supports, including a \$10,000 loan forgiveness program for physicians in specialties with postgraduate training programs that last more than five years and have fewer U.S. applicants than total training and fellowship positions. Reps. Rob Andrews (D-NJ) and Charles Boustany, Jr., MD, FACS (R-LA), were instrumental in ensuring the inclusion of this provision. The legislation also would increase the annual Perkins loan limit for graduate/professional students from \$6,000 to \$8,000 and raise the aggregate limit for graduate/professional students from \$40,000 to \$60,000. In addition, the bill calls on the Government Accountability Office to study the education-related indebtedness of medical school graduates. Reps. Tom Price, MD, FACS (R-GA), and Boustany requested the inclusion of this provision. For more information, contact the Division of Advocacy and Health Policy at [ahp@facs.org](mailto:ahp@facs.org).

## **Budget plan slashes health care**

The fiscal year (FY) 2009 budget that President Bush submitted to Congress on February 4 would slash federal spending for health care programs, especially those dealing with emergency and trauma care. For example, the President proposes to eliminate funding entirely for the Trauma Care Systems Planning and Development Act, the Emergency Medical Services (EMS) for Children program, the Preventive Health and Health Services Block Grant that helps fund state EMS programs, and the Traumatic Brain Injury Program.

The President's plan also would eliminate or significantly reduce many health professions' training support programs and proposes to stop funding GME programs in children's hospitals. The documents say little about physician payment and offer no solutions to the Medicare fee schedule problems that will produce annual pay cuts absent congressional intervention.

For details about the President's health-related budget proposals, go to <http://www.hhs.gov>.