

## **Congress Passes the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018!**

The American Medical Association (AMA) has announced that Senate and House of Representatives have passed the Bipartisan Budget Act of 2018 and it has been signed into law.

According to an AMA Press Release, in addition to continuing to fund the federal government through March 23, the most recent continuing resolution (CR) addressed a broad range of health, supplemental spending, budget and tax matters.

**More importantly, the proposal would have extended the current misvalued code process for 2019 which would have resulted in the elimination of virtually all of the currently scheduled Medicare physician payment update.**

**Instead, the update was reduced from 0.5 percent to 0.25 percent to help offset the cost of other policies that benefited physicians.**

The legislation also included technical corrections to the Medicare Access and CHIP Reauthorization Act (MACRA) that were sought by the AMA and other physician organizations. Items of particular interest are noted in bold type below. Under the budget deal:

- **Medicare Part B drug costs will be excluded from payment adjustments under MACRA's Merit-based Incentive Payment System (MIPS) and from low-volume threshold determinations.**
- Greater flexibility will be provided for an additional three years in scoring and in the weight given to the Cost component of MIPS.
- The Centers for Medicare and Medicaid Services will have more flexibility in setting overall performance thresholds for three more years.

Other provisions of interest to physicians include the following:

- **The Independent Payment Advisory Board was permanently repealed.**
- **The Children's Health Insurance Program (CHIP) was extended for an additional four years beyond the previous CR's six-year extension.**
- The work Geographic Practice Cost Index floor was extended for two years.
- The statutory requirement for electronic health record standards to become more stringent over time was eliminated.