



# Wisconsin Eye M.D.

A Member Publication of the Wisconsin Academy of Ophthalmology

Administrative Office: 10 W. Phillip Rd., Suite 120, Vernon Hills, IL 60061-1730

Toll-free Phone: 800/838-3627 ♦ Fax: 847/680-1682 ♦ E-mail: RichardPaul@DLS.net

July 2008

## Overview of the 2008 Legislative Session

By Peggy Rosenzweig, WAO Lobbyist

### *End of Session Summary*

The state legislature adjourned at the end of May after taking up a controversial budget repair bill requested by Governor Doyle. It appears that legislators were more inclined to “punt” than to “repair.” They put off school aid payments, took lapsed appropriations from the Transportation Funds and restructured the Tobacco Securitization Fund by deferring payments to the state further into the future. All of these measures avoided cuts in spending or tax increases, which comes as no surprise in this election year! Meanwhile, Gov. Doyle vetoed part of the bill which prompted the Republicans in the legislature to attempt an override, an effort that was unsuccessful. Lawmakers now have adjourned from their Regular Session.

### *Preparing for the September Primary Election*

As the September 9<sup>th</sup> primary elections rapidly approach, it is important for Wisconsin ophthalmologists to be aware of key legislative races. Though the Republicans have held the majority in the Assembly since 1994, only five seats now divide the Democrats and the Republicans. The partisan balance in the Assembly is crucial because the majority party determines the political agenda for the legislative session, controls the chairmanships of the committees, and sets the overall tone for the direction of the Assembly. Given the national political scene, there is a great hunger among the Democrats to prevail in this year’s races.

Capitol watchers have predicted that the Senate, on the other hand, will continue to be controlled by Democrats, despite a few lively contests. One race of particular interest is the Wasserman/Darling race in Milwaukee’s 8<sup>th</sup> Senate District. Democratic Representative Sheldon Wasserman is a practicing physician and has served in the Assembly for 14 years. He is challenging incumbent Republican Senator Alberta Darling, who is married to a practicing physician and has held her Senate seat since 1992. Both candidates have supported the WAO’s goals in the past, posing either a dilemma or a win-win situation (depending on your point of view!).



Another close race to keep an eye on is in Eagle River’s 12<sup>th</sup> Senate District, between Democrat Jim Holperin and Republican Tom Tiffany. Holperin, a 12-year veteran of the Assembly and former Secretary of the Wisconsin Department of Tourism is looking to fill the shoes of retired Democratic Senator Roger Breske. Tiffany, who ran for the same seat in 2004, is a small business owner and an active member of his community in the Northwoods. Observers feel this could be a “swing” district with no clear frontrunner at the present time. This will certainly be an exciting race to watch!

Across the state, and especially in these close races, it is essential for Wisconsin ophthalmologists to be engaged in the political sphere and play a role in the electoral process. The outcomes of state legislative concerns that directly affect you, including Medicaid reimbursement rates and scope of practice legislation, can be influenced by the WAO’s collective voice. If you are interested in becoming more involved in your local political races, please contact our administrative office.

## WAO to Unveil New Website

We are pleased to announce that the new WAO website will go “live” later this summer. The new site, [www.WIeyeMD.org](http://www.WIeyeMD.org), will have several exciting features:



- A “Find an Eye MD” function for the public to locate nearby ophthalmologists;
- A members-only section that will update WAO members on key legislative developments and other member services;
- Information on upcoming professional education opportunities;
- An interactive calendar of future meetings and conferences;
- And much more!

## Congress Overrides President’s Veto of the Medicare Fee Fix

*By Joy Newby, LPN, CPC, PCS, Newby Consulting, Inc.*

You have probably already heard the great news that Congress voted to override President Bush’s veto of the Medicare Improvements for Patients and Providers Act of 2008 (MIPPA) on July 15, 2008. As a result, instead of receiving a 10.6 percent decrease in payments, reimbursement for services furnished from July 1 through December 31, 2008 will be the same as the reimbursement received for services furnished from January 1 through June 30, 2008.

The information distributed by the Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services and others regarding the fee schedule change has led to some confusion about what the correct post-June payments should be. This fee fix will not result in a payment increase but will keep the fees the same for the entire calendar year. So, the fee schedule you loaded into your system for January– June services will be the same fee schedule you will use for the remainder of the year. The 0.5 percent update was an increase over the 2007 fees intended to extend past the original June 30<sup>th</sup> deadline and is not an additional increase in the fees from the first half of the year.

MIPPA also includes a 1.1 percent increase for the 2009 fee schedule. Hopefully Congress will use the next 18 months to fix the problems with the sustainable growth rate (SGR) formula so physicians will not continue to face these potentially horrific decreases in Medicare payments. According to information released by the American Medical Association, the Congressional Budget Office estimates the 2010 fee schedule could be decreased by more than 20 percent.

## Mark Your Calendars for the 2009 Annual Meeting!

The 2008 WAO Annual Meeting was a huge success. Nearly 40 Wisconsin ophthalmologists heard talks on clinical subjects such as canaloplasty, thyroid eye disease, corneal dystrophy, and cataract surgery, as well as important practice management issues. The meeting, held on May 16, 2008, also featured Jim Lynch, JD of Dorsey & Whitney, LLC, who gave the ethics lecture on taking a case-based approach to ethical expert witness testimony. Joy Newby, LPN, CPC, PCS, also gave a presentation on coding and documentation updates, as well as the Medicare Physician Quality Reporting Initiative (PQRI) program.

*Next year’s annual meeting will be held on Friday, March 13, 2009* at the Edgewater Hotel in Madison, WI. The meeting will once again feature interactive audience participation, as well as updates on public policy issues and coding and documentation changes. Registration materials will be distributed at a later time, but be sure to block out your calendars now!

