

issues - health

Health

Overview

Throughout out her entire career in government, health care has been among Rep. Louise Slaughter's top priorities. Rep. Slaughter is considered one of the top health care authorities in the U.S. Congress, with a range of legislative victories under her belt. As the only Member of Congress holding a master's degree in public health, she is uniquely qualified to examine and discuss the health care issues before our nation.

Rep. Slaughter's record on health care reflects her broad interest and deep commitment in these issues. She is acknowledged as the leading expert in Congress on genetic discrimination issues, having sponsored two bills on this issue and garnered the support of a majority of Congress for banning this practice. During the early 1990s, she was responsible for securing the first \$500 million dedicated by Congress to breast cancer research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH). She was a leader in efforts to force the NIH to include women in all clinical trials, a practice that had been resisted for many years. She sponsored the first law directing the NIH to research the miscarriage drug diethylstilbestrol (DES), which had serious health consequences for some children exposed in utero. Rep. Slaughter has also authored legislation to improve research on women's environmental health, educate Americans about colorectal cancer, and reduce waste, fraud and abuse in the Medicare program. Rep. Slaughter has been active on a wide range of other health issues, including antimicrobial resistance, female genital mutilation, environmental health, and men's health.

Rep. Slaughter is especially committed to the health care needs of her home district. Her office acts as a liaison between local health care providers and federal health care agencies. She regularly supports applications from area hospitals and researchers for federal grant funds. In 2007 alone, over \$100 million in federal grants related to health care came into the 28th Congressional District. For Fiscal Year 2008, she obtained \$3.2 million for Koning to develop and commercialize cone beam CT scanners to provide breast cancer diagnostic accuracy at lower radiation levels; almost \$500,000 for Niagara Falls Memorial Medical Center to upgrade equipment and staff their cardiac research center; and \$3 million for the Hauptman-Woodward Medical Research Institute to research how viruses mutate to transfer from humans to animals.

Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act (P.L. 110-233)

On May 21, 2008, legislation authored by Rep. Slaughter prohibiting health insurance companies and employers from discriminating based on genetic information became law. The Genetic Non-discrimination Information Act, will prevent health insurers from canceling, denying, refusing to renew, or changing the terms or premiums of coverage based on genetic information. It also would prohibit employers from making hiring, firing, promotion, and other employment-related decision based on genetic factors. This legislation first passed the House of Representatives on April 5th 2007 by a vote of 420-3, it then underwent minor revision and passed unanimously in the Senate, 95-0, on April 24, 2008. On May 1st, 2008, the bill went before the House once again where it passed 414-1 and was cleared for the President's signature. On May 21st, 2008, H.R. 493 was signed into law by the President and is now public law no. 110-233. Chairwoman Slaughter's remarks on this historic 21st century civil rights legislation can be found here.

National Institutes of Health

Rep. Slaughter was a strong supporter of doubling the NIH budget over five years, a goal that was accomplished in 2003. As the nation's premier medical research institution, the NIH is responsible both for performing research and funding other investigators. Today, scientists are on the verge of breakthroughs in genetics, cell biology, and other areas that will allow for innovative new methods of detection and treatment, as well as hopefully cures and prevention. Doubling the NIH budget will ensure that no critical opportunity is wasted for lack of funding. Rep. Slaughter has cosponsored annual resolutions and signed yearly letters to the Appropriations Subcommittee for Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education in support of increasing the NIH budget.

Children's Health Lead Paint

Rep. Slaughter is fighting for an end to childhood lead poisoning in Western New York and across the country. As an illustration of the problem, an average of 1,200 children in Monroe County are exposed to lead poisoning each year, and 37 percent of the children tested have more lead in their blood than the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention currently considers safe. When lead paint is not eliminated from the home, children's ability to learn is impaired. Although lead-based paint was banned from use in homes in 1978, many older houses and apartments still contain lead-based paint. Research shows that children with elevated blood lead levels are seven times more likely to drop out of school and twice as likely to lose years in language acquisition.

Rep. Slaughter secured \$600,000 for a national study to pinpoint the lead exposure levels that damage children's health. Rep. Slaughter was also successful in preventing a \$29 million cut in funding for the Office of Lead Hazard Control at the Department of Housing and Urban Development in FY08. Over the past few years, this program has directly awarded over \$5 million to the City of Rochester and Monroe County and over \$3 million to Erie County to eliminate lead paint in hundreds of housing units.

Toy Safety

Last year, the Consumers Union dubbed the Year of the Recall. There were 45 million toys and children's products recalled in 2007 — including Barbie accessories, Thomas the Tank Engines, toy magnets, and lead-coated jewelry. Certain toys and children's products were found to contain nearly 200 times the legal amount of lead. This year, dangerous toy and product recalls are happening at an even swifter rate, with the number of recalls of toys and children's products up 29 percent over the first half of 2007.

In late July 2008, the House and Senate passed the Consumer Product Safety Act. This critically important bill will strengthen the ability of the Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) to prevent dangerous toys from getting to market in the first place, get unsafe products off the shelves more quickly, and increase fines and penalties for violating product safety laws.

The bill will require publicly available and searchable database of on the safety of consumer products, provide state attorneys general with the ability to take appropriate actions against toys and manufacturers that are alleged to violate current law, establish strong safety standards for all terrain vehicles (ATVs), as well as provide whistleblower protections for employees of manufacturers, private labelers, retailers, and distributors with respect to alleged violations of Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC)-enforced product.

Congresswoman Slaughter played a crucial role in negotiating to make sure the following provisions were included in the legislation:

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Mandatory standards

for testing toys for potential hazards without undercutting the authority of the states to monitor these standards;

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Ban any specific

phthalate implicated by sound scientific evidence that suggest harmful effects to children; and

-
Establish strong

safety standards for all terrain vehicles (ATVs), including both domestic and imported models.

The Children's Health and Medicare Protection (CHAMP) Act

Rep. Slaughter has supported every American's right to accessible, affordable, high quality health care. HR 3162, the CHAMP Act makes important and necessary strides to ensure this right for all Americans, particularly children and seniors. This bill reauthorizes the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) for 6 million children and provides 5 million more low income children with health coverage. The CHAMP Act maintains current SCHIP eligibility laws at the same time giving states the tools to reach the millions of uninsured children who are eligible, but not enrolled in the program. Additionally, it offers coverage to pregnant women.

In addition to expanding SCHIP, the bill makes improvements for Medicare beneficiaries. Instead of subsidizing HMOs as they enjoy record profits, this legislation will curb overpayments to Medicare Advantage plans, thereby benefiting Medicare beneficiaries by reducing costs and premiums and improving Medicare's long-term fiscal sustainability. The bill also ensures seniors continue to have access to the doctors of their choice by stopping a 10 percent Medicare payment cut to doctors and instead providing a 2-year increase in reimbursement rates. Finally, it reduces co-payments for mental health services and encourages seniors to seek preventive health benefits by eliminating co-payments and deductibles.

Rep. Slaughter supported the CHAMP Act when it passed in the House of Representatives by a vote of 225-204 on August 1st 2007.

Environmental Health

In July 2005, Rep. Slaughter joined researchers from the Environmental Working Group (EWG) to publicize a shocking study documenting the degree of chemical pollution present in the bodies of newborn infants. The EWG investigation tested blood from ten newborn infants for a range of chemical pollutants, many of which are associated with abnormal development and poor health. On average, the infants had over 200 industrial chemicals in their blood. Rep. Slaughter's blood was also tested, and was revealed to contain 271 harmful substances. Subsequent to the study's release, Rep. Slaughter reintroduced, the Environmental Health Research Act, designed to research the impact of environmental factors on the health of women and children. Over the last 30 years, the U.S.

had seen a steep rise in the occurrence of numerous diseases and disorders impacting the minds and bodies of our children. At the same time, more than 80,000 new chemicals have been introduced into our environment since the 1950s. This Congress, Rep. Slaughter reintroduced The Environmental Health Research Act as two separate bills.

The Environmental Hormone Disruption Act authorizes the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS) to conduct a comprehensive program to research and educate the public on the health effects of hormone-disrupting chemicals. The Women's Environmental Health and Disease Prevention Act authorizes the NIEHS to establish multidisciplinary

research centers to investigate how environmental factors may be related to women's health and disease prevention.

In the early 1990s, Rep. Slaughter wrote legislation to ensure the universal vaccination of children, leading to increased federal assistance for immunization, so that all children will be protected from serious preventable illness. The Administration based its child vaccine proposal on her bill, and the overall immunization rate for pre-school children jumped to a record 81 percent for 2004, surpassing the Health People 2010 goal.

Rep. Slaughter spoke out in support repeatedly and voted for the federal child health insurance program, which is now enabling thousands of low-income children to access health care services like vaccinations and regular check-ups. She also strongly supported passage of a federal law requiring health insurers to cover at least a 48-hour hospital stay after childbirth when a woman and her doctor consider it necessary, ending so-called "drive-through deliveries."

Rep. Slaughter has also been an outspoken advocate for programs like Healthy Start, Women, Infants and Children (WIC), and prenatal care for poor women, which help ensure that all infants receive proper medical care, nutrition, and a healthy start in life.

Older
Americans' Health

Rep. Slaughter has long supported efforts to provide all seniors with a prescription drug benefit through the Medicare program, cosponsoring numerous bills over the past several years. On November 21, 2003 the majority leadership presented to the House of Representatives a proposed Medicare reform package. After a great deal of thoughtful review and discussion with her constituents, Rep. Slaughter voted against this proposal because, in her judgment, it would not serve her constituents well. (For more information on this issue, see Rep. Slaughter's record on Seniors Health.)

Rep. Slaughter has a history of activism on the issue of seniors and prescription drug costs. In order to focus public attention on this problem, Rep. Slaughter saw off a group of her constituents as they traveled to Montreal, Canada to purchase their prescriptions at dramatically lower prices in 2000. In the following years, she released three separate reports showing that local seniors and individuals without health insurance paid significantly higher prices for prescription medication than pharmaceutical companies' most favored customers.

Rep. Slaughter is also a proud

cosponsor of H.R. 4, the Medicare Prescription Drug Price Negotiation Act of 2007, which passed the House of Representatives of January 12, 2007 by a vote of 255-170. H.R. 4 requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to negotiate for lower drug prices for Medicare beneficiaries. In 2003, Rep. Slaughter opposed the Medicare Modernization Act, including the prescription drug plan, for many reasons. From the "donut hole" provision that will require seniors to pay significant out of pocket costs, to the restrictions placed on the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) so they could not negotiate lower price drugs for our seniors, the Medicare Part D plan has been a debacle since its conception. Since implementation, this bill has been shown to benefit drug companies while failing to promote any meaningful relief for our seniors struggling with skyrocketing prescription costs. H.R. 4 repeals the special-interest provision - this gift to the drug companies, and instead, requires the Secretary of Health and Human Services to conduct cost-saving negotiations for Medicare Part D beneficiaries.

Stem Cells

Over 100 million Americans suffer from cancer, Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, diabetes, spinal cord injuries and other debilitating diseases and disorders for which embryonic stem cell research holds great promise in finding new and better treatments and cures. Expanding stem cell research has strong bipartisan support in Congress, and is supported by over 72 percent of Americans.

The Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act increases the number of embryonic stem cell lines eligible to be used for federally-funded research. The bill authorizes HHS to support research involving embryonic stem cells meeting certain criteria, regardless of the date on which the stem cells were derived from an embryo. The bill lays out strict ethical guidelines, which allow federal funding for embryonic stem cell research. In order to acquire funding the following must be met:

Embryos

used to develop stem cells must be originally created for fertility treatment and are in excess of treatment needs;

An

embryo may only be used for stem cell research if the donors give their written consent.

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individuals seeking fertility treatments must have "donated the embryos with written informed consent and without receiving any financial or other inducements to make the donation.

Rep. Slaughter has been an avid supporter of the Stem Cell Research. She was an original cosponsor of HR 3, which passed the House on January 11th by a vote of 253-174. She also voted in favor of S 5, which passed the House on June 7th by a vote of 247-176. She has managed the rules in support of allowing consideration of this legislation and has spoken on the House Floor numerous times in support of this research.

Antibiotics

Antibiotic resistance is a growing problem in the United States, costing the nation \$4 billion annually as we are forced to use more aggressive treatments to treat illnesses that were once easily, and inexpensively, cured. Sixty years ago, the discovery of antibiotics changed the outcome of a pneumonia diagnosis from a death prognosis to an antibiotic prescription. We have come to rely on antibiotics to cure potentially lethal infections. Unfortunately, the overuse and misuse of these important drugs have led to the rapid spread of resistant bacteria. There are currently seven classes of antibiotics considered to be medically important in human medicine approved by the FDA for nontherapeutic use in food producing animals. The American Medical Association has stated its opposition to this practice because it undermines the effectiveness of antibiotics by creating resistant bacteria, posing serious risks to human health.

Rep. Slaughter introduced HR 962, the Preservation of Antibiotics for Medical Treatment Act of 2007. The bill phases out the nontherapeutic use of antibiotics in food-producing animals, while permitting their continued therapeutic use in sick animals. The bill also directs the FDA to consider the potential antibiotic resistance consequences when evaluating applications for new animal uses in antibiotics.

Links

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