

August 24, 2007 - Slaughter Calls for Greater Awareness of Emergency Contraception

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today called for renewed efforts to increase awareness of emergency contraception (EC) on the one-year anniversary of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval of the over-the-counter sale of Plan B emergency contraception.

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Friday, August 24, 2007

Slaughter Calls for Greater Awareness of Emergency Contraception on Anniversary of FDA's Approval of Plan B's over-the-counter Sale

Washington, DC - Rep. Louise M. Slaughter (D-NY-28), Chairwoman of the House Rules Committee, today called for renewed efforts to increase awareness of emergency contraception (EC) on the one-year anniversary of the Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) approval of the over-the-counter sale of Plan B emergency contraception.

To increase awareness and education on EC, Rep. Slaughter has reintroduced H.R. 3372, the Emergency Contraception Education Act.

"The FDA's decision one year ago was a victory for sound science and, more importantly, for women's health," Rep. Slaughter said. "As we reflect on this important anniversary, we must also look to the future."

"Greater awareness and knowledge of EC would help women prevent unintended pregnancies and reduce the need for abortions in the United States," Rep. Slaughter said. "Unfortunately, barriers to information and access are hindering EC from reaching its full potential. We can and must do more to protect women's reproductive health by increasing knowledge of emergency contraception and expanding access to it. EC represents a critically needed solution for a very pressing problem," Rep. Slaughter said.

BACKGROUND: The Emergency Contraception Education Act (H.R. 3372)

The Emergency Contraception Education Act was first introduced by Rep. Slaughter in the 107th Congress, and was reintroduced by the Congresswoman on August 3rd, 2007. It has 60 original co-sponsors in the House.

The bill will initiate a large-scale education campaign to better inform women and health care providers about emergency contraception. Specifically, the legislation will direct the Secretary of Health and Human Services to develop and disseminate information on EC to health care providers, including recommendations on the use of EC in appropriate cases and how to obtain copies of information developed by HHS for distribution to patients. The Secretary will also be required to develop and disseminate information on EC to the American public.

Each year, 3 million pregnancies, or one-half of all pregnancies in the United States, are unintended. Half of these pregnancies end in abortion.

Emergency contraception is a concentrated form of the hormones found in ordinary birth control. It does not cause abortion, but like birth control, acts primarily by stopping the release of an egg from the ovary.

Emergency contraception is a safe and effective means of preventing pregnancy. If taken within 72 hours after unprotected sex or contraceptive failure, emergency contraception can reduce the risk of pregnancy by as much as 89 percent.

Many patients and health care providers remain uninformed about this important contraceptive option. Studies indicate that in the United States, 2 out of 3 women of reproductive age remain unaware of EC.

The FDA's decision to approve the over-the-counter sale of Plan B came more than two-and-a-half years after the Agency's own scientific advisory panel recommended that such a decision be made. The delay was widely thought to be the result of political pressure being put on the FDA's commissioners.

"The de-politicization of the FDA is long overdue," Rep. Slaughter said at the time. "This decision is a step in the right direction. But until politics stops trumping science at our federal agencies, the real needs of real Americans will continue to be ignored."

###