

BREAST CANCER AWARENESS
MONTH

SPEECH OF

HON. STEVE R. ROTHMAN

OF NEW JERSEY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Wednesday, October 22, 1997

Mr. ROTHMAN. Mr. Speaker, I am proud to rise today and join my colleagues in recognition of October as Breast Cancer Awareness Month. We have all heard the figures: Last year, 182,000 women were diagnosed with breast cancer, 46,000 died of it, and currently 2.6 million women are living with it.

These staggeringly high numbers are one of the reasons why some of the first bills I put my name on as a cosponsor when I came to Congress last January were breast cancer related. One bill would guarantee a minimum hospital stay of 48 hours for a woman having a mastectomy. Another would require health insurance companies that provide coverage for mastectomies to cover reconstructive

breast surgery that results from a mastectomy. Still another would require insurance plans to cover annual mammograms for women ages 40 and above who choose to have the test.

These are important bills, and I hope they will move quickly through their respective committees and that the leadership will bring them to the floor so we can pass them and have them signed into law. However, as helpful as these bills may be, I wish that they were unnecessary. I wish we did not need to worry how to best treat the disease, or to create guidelines for hospital stays and insurance coverage. I wish that someday, someday very soon, breast cancer will be a thing of the past.

The medical community has made huge advances in detecting and treating cancerous tumors, and I applaud their accomplishments. Thanks to numerous studies, no one will dispute that early detection is a key component to surviving this devastating illness. In addition, Congress helped with the passage of the Balanced Budget Act which provided Federal funding for annual screening mammograms for women over the age of 39. With newer forms

of treatment available, early detection almost ensures survival.

Even with all that has been done, however, we still know very little about how to prevent breast cancer. More research needs to be done. Since at least two-thirds of breast cancer occurs in women with no known risk factors, we must work to find why these women acquired the disease. To do this we must continue to support researchers so they are able to find a cure.

Women who battle breast cancer are heroes. They survive and endure pain and treatment that no person should have to suffer. However, we need them to continue to be heroes in other aspects of life. We need them to continue to be mothers, wives, and daughters, teachers, workers, and full contributors to society. Some 2.6 million women have breast cancer. This number is unacceptably high, and will always be until it reaches zero. Let's continue to work together until breast cancer is a crisis of the past.