

THE REINTRODUCTION OF THE
SHINGLES PREVENTION ACT

HON. MAZIE K. HIRONO

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Ms. HIRONO. Madam Speaker, I rise today to reintroduce the Shingles Prevention Act. I would like to thank NEIL ABERCROMBIE, TAMMY BALDWIN, DONNA EDWARDS, BARNEY FRANK, AL GREEN, RAUL GRIJALVA, MAURICE HINCHEY, JIM McDERMOTT, JAN SCHAKOWSKY, LOUISE SLAUGHTER, and GENE TAYLOR for joining me as original cosponsors of this bill.

Many of us have had shingles or know of others, especially over the age of 60, who have. In 2006 a new vaccine was created that prevents occurrence of shingles or dramatically reduces the symptoms and pain of shingles. Experts agree that adults over the age of 60 should receive this immunization.

Half of us will experience shingles by the time we are 80. Shingles is a painful skin rash often accompanied by fever, headache, chills, and upset stomach. What is more pressing is that one in five shingles patients will endure post-herpetic neuralgia—severe pain lasting much longer than the rash itself. The pain can be so intolerable that patients are housebound, and there have been cases of suicide from the disease. Shingles is most common among seniors because the immune system wanes with age, making Medicare beneficiaries the best candidates for the vaccine.

Since its development in 2006, the shingles vaccine has been recommended for adults 60 years or older by the Centers for Disease Control. However, current Medicare Part D coverage of the vaccine is insufficient. Not all beneficiaries are enrolled in Part D or another drug prescription plan. More important, seniors are facing high out-of-pocket costs due to a lack of coordination among doctors, pharmacies, and Part D plans. For example, there is no established direct billing method between doctors and plans for Part D vaccines. Because of this, beneficiaries typically must pay the full price up front, which results in out-of-pocket costs that limit access to those that need the vaccine the most—our seniors.

The billing problem, the resulting low utilization of the vaccine, and costly storage requirements are enough to keep many doctors from stocking the vaccine. When doctors do not stock, beneficiaries' only alternative is to obtain the vaccine from pharmacists. But many states do not allow pharmacies to administer Part D vaccines, so the beneficiary has to take the vial from the pharmacy back to the physician's office. Thus, a senior who is thinking about getting vaccinated would have to go first to the doctor's office for a consult, then to the pharmacist, then back to the doctor for the shot.

Not surprisingly, many seniors are not getting immunized against shingles. This low utilization rate contributes to the half a billion dollars of treatment costs per year and, for hundreds of thousands of seniors, many weeks spent suffering from a disease that could have been prevented.

The Shingles Prevention Act will move shingles vaccine coverage to Part B—thus treating it in the same manner as the flu vaccine under Medicare, simplifying the process for physicians and beneficiaries, and lessening the cost

burden for our seniors. This is a common sense and cost effective way to increase access to high quality health care for our seniors, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to ensure its passage.

ANNIVERSARY OF DECLARATION
OF INDEPENDENCE OF KOSOVO

HON. GARY C. PETERS

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Mr. PETERS. Madam Speaker, I rise today to recognize the first anniversary of the declaration of independence of the Republic of Kosovo. February 17, 2008 brought an important measure of clarity and vision to the future of Kosovo—and indeed the entire region—with the resounding declaration by the Kosovar people that Kosovo is an independent republic.

Almost one year to the day, members and supporters of Michigan's Albanian community will gather on February 15 at St. Paul's Catholic Church in Rochester Hills, Michigan to commemorate and celebrate the first anniversary of Kosovo's independence. On that day, I will join Dom Anton Kqira and Honorary General Counsel to Albania Ekrem Bardha, and hundreds more to commemorate this historic occasion.

There, we will honor and recognize the determination and perseverance of the Kosovar people, who under the special leadership of President Ibrahim Rugova forged a path for their own future. We will honor and recognize our own community leaders in Michigan, including Dom Kqira and Counsel General Bardha, who tirelessly pressed for official action to address the crisis in Kosovo and we will honor and recognize those leaders of our own country, President William J. Clinton, Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and General Wesley Clark (Ret.) among others, who took the action in March of 1999 that laid the foundation for Kosovo independence. Finally, we will honor and recognize the countless members of the Albanian Diaspora community who provided shelter, material and moral support to the nearly 800,000 displaced Kosovars during the crisis.

Madam Speaker, as we mark this occasion of the first anniversary of the independence of Kosovo we hold much hope for the future of an independent Kosovo. But, with sober recognition of the work yet ahead, we stand fully committed to meeting every challenge.

CONDOLENCES TO THE SHURRAB
FAMILY

HON. PETER WELCH

OF VERMONT

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Mr. WELCH. Madam Speaker, I recently heard the tragic story of Amer Shurrab, a young man from Khan Yunis in Gaza. Amer is a recent graduate of Middlebury College, in Vermont.

On Friday, January 16, Amer's brothers, Kassab and Ibrahim, and father, Mohammad, were driving from their farm near the Israeli

border to their apartment in Khan Yunis. The three men had waited until the daily three-hour calm designated by the Israeli Defense Forces before beginning their journey. They drove the family's jeep through the city and then, without any warning, the car was fired upon by the IDF.

Kassab, a 28-year-old engineer, was killed almost immediately. His father and Ibrahim, an 18-year-old college student, were wounded but survived the initial barrage of gunfire. When the two tried to crawl to safety, the IDF shot the street around them. An ambulance that they managed to call was turned away blocks from the scene. For the next 20 hours, the two were forced to remain in the jeep.

Amer's father spread the word to the immediate family, and the family did all it could to get help. Family members called Israeli government officials, international aid organizations, and human rights groups, while Amer's father, still stuck in the jeep, managed to get through to local radio stations and BBC Arabic to broadcast his pleas for help live on the air. But no help could get through. In the middle of the night, Ibrahim Shurrab bled to death in his father's arms. When relating his story, Amer repeated one word over and over again to describe what happened to his family: cruel. "It was just so cruel," he repeated.

The Israeli government must conduct a full and open investigation of the circumstances regarding this horrible tragedy. I am not sure what kind of explanation can ever account for such suffering, but those responsible for reportedly denying aid to the injured should be held accountable and punished accordingly.

My heart aches for the Shurrab family and all those who have lost loved ones in the most recent round of violence. I will remember their story and pursue peace in the hope that stories like Amer's not be repeated in the future.

REMEMBERING THE SIX VICTIMS
OF THE 1/31/09 AIRPLANE CRASH
IN WEST VIRGINIA

HON. JANICE D. SCHAKOWSKY

OF ILLINOIS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, February 12, 2009

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Madam Speaker, I rise tonight to express my condolences to the family and friends of the six Chicago-area residents who were recently killed in an airplane crash in West Virginia.

On January 31, a twin-engine Piper PA-34 plane carrying four members of Chicago's American Polish Aero-Club and two guests crashed in the woods near Kenova, West Virginia. The plane had taken off from Lake in the Hills Airport and was bound for Charlotte, North Carolina and Clearwater, Florida, where the four members of the club were going to view planes for sale. The club was hoping to purchase a plane to pull glider planes, according to President Chester Wojnicki.

The four club members were all licensed pilots, and all four had immigrated to the United States from Poland. Ireneusz Michalowski of Des Plaines, Kazimierz Adamski of Morton Grove, Wesley Dobrzanski of Niles, and Stanley Matras of Chicago shared not only their cultural heritage but also their love of flying. Also aboard the plane were Monika Niemiec, a reporter for a local Polish radio show, and