

EXTENSIONS OF REMARKS

PHARMA'S CAMPAIGN TO KILL MEDICARE PRESCRIPTION DRUG LEGISLATION FOR AMERICA'S SENIORS

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Monday, September 27, 1999

Mr. STARK. Mr. Speaker, poll after poll shows the American public strongly supports adding a drug benefit to Medicare. Unfortunately, the Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America has mounted a silly, sleazy \$20–\$30 million campaign featuring an actress named Flo to oppose comprehensive prescription drug coverage for America's seniors. They use a phony front name, Citizens for Better Medicare.

Perhaps a better name for this campaign-to-deceive-seniors would be: Corporations for Beaucoup Money . . . or Companies for Bundling Money (to trick the public into thinking that the Rx debate is about big government instead of comprehensive Medicare drug coverage) . . . or Corporations for Bigger (Profit) Margins.

PhRMA is apparently convinced that if Congress adds a prescription drug benefit to Medicare, their member companies won't be able to continue pricing drugs at the stratospheric levels many do today. Those pricing strategies are so distorted that Medicare beneficiaries who have no drug insurance are being charged more than twice as much, on average, as prices paid by enrollees of large group health plans. And for the limited number of drugs that Medicare currently covers—generally those administered by physicians—Medicare is being overcharged by billions of dollars. This was made painfully clear in a report issued last year by the HHS Inspector General, which found that Medicare paid \$1 billion more in 1997 than the VA did for the same 34 drugs.

Individual seniors are being harmed by artificially inflated drug prices, too. Last year's stunning 18% growth in drug spending means that fewer elderly people—who need and use pharmaceutical medications more than any other age cohort—will be able to fill the prescriptions their doctors order this year. After all, the median annual income of seniors in this country was about \$21,000 in 1997.

In contrast, the average compensation for CEOs among PhRMA's top 12 companies last year was nearly \$28 million. Stock options for U.S. pharmaceutical pharaohs were worth far more: \$103 million on average in 1998.

Major drug companies also spend billions every year on campaigns to influence which drugs doctors prescribe. This spring, a Florida physician mailed me a sample of the invitations he received from pharmaceutical companies for the week of April 25. Here they are:

Sunday: The doctor and his colleagues are invited to a Niaspan-sponsored Afternoon-at-

the-Races event at Tampa Day Downs, which includes use of a private suite, plus an expensive lunch and open bar from noon to 3 p.m.;

Wednesday: The doctor and his colleagues are invited to a Pfizer-sponsored complementary dinner at Landry's Seafood, an upscale restaurant where no entree is under \$25 per person;

Thursday: It's a tough choice: Hoechst Marion Roussel is picking up dinner at Charley's Steak House . . . but across town, Pfizer is paying for dinner at Alfano's;

Friday: What a bonanza! Free tickets for the docs, their spouses and children to watch the Tampa Bay Devil Rays play the Seattle Mariners.

That's not all. "In addition to these free meals," the physician writes, "I have been invited to a second baseball game at Tropicana Field, plus our office has been served three lunches for 25 people this week by the pharmaceutical companies."

In 1998, pharmaceutical companies spent an amazing \$7 billion in these and other promotions designed to influence which drugs doctors prescribe to their patients. Advertising to consumers is climbing too: spending on direct-to-consumer advertising last year rose to \$1.3 billion.

It is important to remember that "Flo" is just another advertising gimmick created by PhRMA. Her ads oppose big government when it comes to discussion of a Medicare drug benefit. What they don't say is that PhRMA vigorously supports big government R&D tax credits, barriers against cheap imports, patent extensions and generous funding of medical research.

The fictitious "Flo" will soon fade from the public's memory. But the plight of real seniors in America who desperately need access to prescription drug coverage will not. It is those seniors we are trying to help by adding a prescription drug benefit to Medicare.

INTRODUCING THE HASS AVOCADO PROMOTION, RESEARCH AND IN- FORMATION ACT OF 1999

HON. KEN CALVERT

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 28, 1999

Mr. CALVERT. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to introduce the Hass Avocado Promotion, Research & Information Act of 1999. This legislation will provide California's 6,000 avocado growers—who produce all of the Hass avocados in the United States—with a new self-help mechanism to enhance their national marketing efforts.

The Hass Avocado Promotion Act will allow avocado growers to fund and operate a coordinated marketing effort to expand domestic and foreign markets. The maintenance and

expansion of existing markets, and the development of new markets, is critical to preserving and strengthening the economic viability of the domestic Hass avocado industry.

This legislation will not be funded by taxpayer dollars—the bill would simply create a mechanism for Hass avocado growers to assess themselves. In addition, importers of Hass avocados into the United States would be assessed. Thus, importers would pay their fair share in helping to expand the consumer market that they share with domestic growers. At present, the national marketing of avocados is paid entirely by California avocado growers through assessments collected by the California Avocado Commission. Therefore, this bill offers a win-win proposition for domestic growers and importers to work together to increase the market for avocados and avocado products.

The bill contains an up-front referendum, giving avocado growers a voting process to formally decide whether to implement this new national promotion program. In this referendum, growers and importers will determine whether or not they choose to assess themselves 2.5 cents per pound to fund a national promotion program. The funds generated will be administered by an 11-member Hass Avocado Board that would be comprised of domestic grower and importer representatives.

I am happy to offer this bipartisan legislation, with my colleague from the Agriculture Committee, Representative CONDIT, aimed at helping our Hass avocado producers and importers help themselves.

I ask my colleagues for their support in advancing this vital legislation for Hass avocado growers and California agriculture.

TRIBUTE TO THE CALDWELL-LYON ASSOCIATION OF MISSIONARY BAPTISTS

HON. ED WHITFIELD

OF KENTUCKY

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Tuesday, September 28, 1999

Mr. WHITFIELD. Mr. Speaker, I rise in recognition of the Caldwell-Lyon Association of Missionary Baptists, composed of 38 Missionary Baptist churches in Caldwell, Lyon, and Hopkins counties in the First Congressional District of Kentucky.

The Caldwell-Lyon Association of Missionary Baptists will celebrate its 75th Anniversary on September 27, 1999 at the Princeton First Baptist Church where its first meeting was held on September 24, 1924. The mission of the Association is to enliven missions at home base by providing fellowship, mission activities, and support to assist churches in carrying out the Great Commission (Matt. 28:18–20).

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