

Even though expanding preventive benefits will cost money in the short term, the long term savings will be immense. Keeping people healthier will reduce the number of hospital admissions, operations, and drug prescriptions—three of Medicare's highest cost items.

I am confident that with the combined efforts of Congressman LEVIN and myself—along with Senators GRAHAM, JEFFORDS and BINGAMAN—the Medicare Wellness Act will be a significant part of any Medicare legislation that is considered this year.

MEDICARE WELLNESS ACT OF 2000 SUMMARY

The Medicare Wellness Act represents a concerted effort to change the fundamental focus of the Medicare program. It would change the program from a sickness program to a wellness program, one that treats illness before it happens.

Title I: Establishes the Healthy Seniors Promotion Program. This program will bring together all the agencies within the Department of Health and Human Services that address the medical, social and behavioral issues affecting the elderly and instruct them to conduct a series of studies that will increase knowledge about and utilization of prevention services among the elderly.

Title II: Adds several new preventative screening and counseling benefits to the Medicare program, including: screening for hypertension, counseling for tobacco cessation (for those with a history of tobacco use), screening for glaucoma (for high-risk beneficiaries), counseling for hormone replacement therapy, screening for vision and hearing loss, nutrition therapy (for high risk beneficiaries), expanded screening and counseling for osteoporosis, and screening for cholesterol (for beneficiaries with a history of heart disease).

Title III: Establishes a health risk appraisal and education program aimed at major behavioral risk factors such as diet, exercise, alcohol and tobacco use, and depression. This program will target both pre-65 individuals and current Medicare beneficiaries. The main goal of this program is to increase awareness among individuals of major risk factors that impact on health, to change personal health habits, improve health status, and save the Medicare program money.

Titles IV and V: Authorize prevention demonstration projects and require the Institute of Medicine to conduct a study every five years to assess the scientific validity of the entire Medicare prevention benefits package. The study will be reviewed by Congress using a "fast-track" process which will force Congress out of the business of micro-managing the Medicare program.

Title VI: Authorizes a demonstration project on depression screening. The results will be evaluated by the Institute of Medicine, which will make recommendations to Congress about whether to add this benefit to Medicare.

THE MEDICARE WELLNESS ACT OF 2000

**HON. SANDER M. LEVIN**

OF MICHIGAN

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 9, 2000

Mr. LEVIN. Mr. Speaker, today I am pleased to join with my colleague, MARK FOLEY, in in-

roducing the Medicare Wellness Act of 2000. We believe this bill will accelerate Medicare's transformation from a "sickness" program to a "wellness" program. Helping seniors stay healthy improves quality of life for Medicare beneficiaries, and in the long run, it will save Medicare money on hospitals and nursing homes.

The Medicare Wellness Act would modernize Medicare by adding basic preventive care benefits. Most working Americans take these benefits—things like blood pressure screening, glaucoma testing, and cholesterol screening—for granted. Unfortunately, the Medicare program currently pays nothing if seniors choose to get these screenings.

In 1997, Congress added the first preventive care benefits to Medicare. For the first time, Medicare beneficiaries could get mammograms, colorectal cancer screening, and diabetes self-management services. Unfortunately, the number of seniors getting those screenings has not increased as much as we hoped. Part of the reason is that all those benefits are still subject to Medicare cost-sharing. For many seniors, that means they still can't afford to get the screenings they need. Another problem is that seniors simply are not aware of the new benefits. The Medicare Wellness Act would correct both problems by eliminating cost sharing for prevention services and authorizing new public education efforts.

In my congressional district, use of Medicare's prevention benefits is still disappointingly low. According to researchers at the Dartmouth Medical School, over 70% of my senior constituents do not receive annual mammograms, and over 80% are not screened for colorectal cancer. I believe the Medicare Wellness Act will help improve these rates, while also giving 1.4 million people in Michigan access to new prevention benefits.

We are pleased to be joined in this effort by Senators BOB GRAHAM, JIM JEFFORDS, and JEFF BINGAMAN, who have introduced companion legislation in the other body.

The bipartisan, bicameral consensus that Medicare needs to cover preventive benefits gives us a real opportunity to improve Medicare now. The sooner we act, the sooner senior citizens will have better health insurance.

FORTY-FOURTH ANNIVERSARY OF TUNISIAN INDEPENDENCE

**HON. NICK J. RAHALL II**

OF WEST VIRGINIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 9, 2000

Mr. RAHALL. Mr. Speaker, I rise to acknowledge the anniversary of the 44th year of Independence for the Republic of Tunisia, to be celebrated on March 20, 2000.

Legend has it that more than 200 years ago, Tunis, as token of esteem and friendship, sent one of its finest stallions to U.S. President George Washington. Unfortunately, customs officials in the nascent republic denied entry to the horse, which spent its remaining days in the port of Baltimore.

After this somewhat rocky start, I am pleased to note that U.S.-Tunisian relations

have improved considerably. Tunisia is about to celebrate its 44th anniversary of the establishment of the Republic of Tunisia as an independent country, a time during which Tunisia has enjoyed a strong and healthy relationship with the United States.

I congratulate Tunisia for its many accomplishments, not the least of which is to have established a more democratic system of government, making every effort to broaden political debate, including passage of an electoral law that reserved 19 seats of the National assembly for members of opposition political parties.

Tunisia has a very impressive economic record, having turned to economic programs designed to privatize state owned companies and to reform the banking and financial sectors over the last decade.

As a result Tunisia's economy has grown at an average rate of 4.65 percent just in the last several years, and its economic success has had a beneficial impact on Tunisia's international standing. Tunisia is one of the few countries to graduate successfully from development assistance and to join the developed world.

Tunisia has also become a moderating force in the Middle East peace process, taking an active role within the international community in fighting terrorism, while maintaining internal stability in the face of external chaos.

I am pleased with the increasingly strong ties between the United States and Tunisia, and join the American people in congratulating the people of Tunisia on this historic occasion. I encourage my colleagues to do the same.

IN RECOGNITION OF TEXAS PUBLIC SCHOOLS WEEK

**HON. RON PAUL**

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, March 9, 2000

Mr. PAUL. Mr. Speaker, as this is Texas Public Schools Week, I wanted to take a moment to offer my thanks to the parents and teachers of my district and those across Texas for all of their hard work to make sure our children get the best education possible. Unfortunately, Congress and the federal bureaucracy continues to strip authority away from parents, teachers and local school boards. While Congress promises the American people that expansions of federal control over local schools will create an education utopia, the fact is the federal education bureaucracy has only made educating the next generation more difficult and diverted resources away from the classroom. For example, while the federal government provides less than 10% of education funding, many school districts find that over 50% of their paperwork is generated by federal mandates. The federal government also forces local school officials to jump through numerous hoops in order to get Washington to return a ridiculously small portion of taxpayer moneys to local public schools.

Over thirty years of centralized control of education has resulted in failure and frustrated parents. It is time for Washington to return control of the nation's school system to the