

August 5, 2008

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KAY GRANGER



12TH DISTRICT, TEXAS

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HOUSE PASSES LANDMARK TOBACCO LEGISLATION

Before adjourning for the August District Work Period, the House considered landmark tobacco legislation, which I was pleased to support. The bill passed the House by a vote of 326-102, and the Senate is expected to consider the bill in September.

The *Family Smoking Prevention and Tobacco Control Act* gives the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) the authority to regulate tobacco products and requires all tobacco manufacturers to disclose the names and descriptions of all ingredients, components, and compounds in tobacco products. The bill gives the FDA the authority to restrict advertising and promotions that appeal to children and adolescents. The bill will reduce the colorful and sleek marketing tobacco companies use to lure young adults by requiring that at least 30 percent of the cigarette pack is covered by a large warning label.

Many public health groups supported the bill including the American Cancer Society, the American Lung Association, the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids, the American Medical Association, and the American Heart Association.

The goal of the legislation is to increase the amount of information available to consumers about what is really in cigarettes and other tobacco products in order to allow individuals to make informed decisions about whether or not to smoke given the health risks associated with smoking. The more people who stop (or never start) smoking, the more money the country will save from not having to treat smokers who have developed cancer, heart disease, or any other of the many diseases associated with smoking. Experts predict that the provisions in the bill will lead to a 2 percent reduction in smoking rates in this country.

ANNIVERSARY OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF MEDICARE AND MEDICAID

This month marks the 43rd anniversary of the establishment of Medicare and Medicaid. These two programs provide vital health care benefits to millions of Americans. In fiscal year 2008, the Medicare program will cover an estimated 44.6 million persons while Medicaid will pay for medical services and long-term care for more than 63 million people. As a health care professional, you know how important these programs are, but you are also probably well aware the current funding mechanism for these programs is unsustainable in the long term.

For the last six years, federal spending has outrun federal revenues. In the long term, projections suggest that if current policies remain unchanged, the United States faces a major fiscal imbalance, largely due to costs associated with the impending retirement of the large baby boom generation and rising health care costs.

Former Comptroller General David Walker has noted that each year Congress does not act to reform its entitlement obligations, the size of the debt the next generation of Americans face grows by \$2 trillion.

Congress needs to act in a bipartisan fashion to protect and preserve these vital programs. Medicare and Medicaid need good management and innovative ideas to ensure they remain solvent. Prudent actions now will save taxpayers money in the long term while meeting the health care needs of

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those cannot care for themselves and millions of seniors.

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