

invites only illusory participation from the states—one year is much too short a time-frame for states to make any decision about transmission siting, much less the right one.

I look forward to working with my colleagues to provide a realistic backstop for the federal government that gives the states time and flexibility to suggest alternatives. I hope that this Congress can advance a more balanced approach.

THE MEDICARE ADVANTAGE
TRUTH IN ADVERTISING ACT

HON. FORTNEY PETE STARK

OF CALIFORNIA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. STARK. Madam Speaker, Medicare Advantage Plans—by name and by advertising—promote that they provide added value to the Medicare benefit.

But under current law, MA plans are allowed to manipulate cost sharing for Medicare benefits. In some instances, enrollees save compared to Medicare. In many other instances, they spend more than they would in the traditional Medicare program. Few seniors or people with disabilities understand that—depending on their health—they could spend far more in a Medicare Advantage plan than they would under traditional Medicare.

Beneficiaries are often charged more for home health, skilled nursing facilities, hospitalizations, durable medical equipment, Part B drugs (chemotherapy being the biggest service), and inpatient mental health services. These services are vital to millions of Medicare beneficiaries who face multiple chronic conditions and depend on affordable health care for their very lives.

As Barbara Kennelly, President of the National Committee To Preserve Social Security and Medicare so aptly puts it, “While MA plans are required to cover everything that Medicare covers, they do not have to cover every benefit in the same way.”

The Medicare Rights Center emphasizes that, “On a daily basis, our counselors assist older adults and people with disabilities enrolled in these plans who run into unexpectedly high out-of-pocket costs for their health care.”

In my district in California, one of the major MA plans in our community charges \$275 a day for the first 10 days in the hospital. This compares to a single charge of \$992 in traditional Medicare for a hospital stay of up to 60 days. That means patients in this so-called Medicare Advantage plan who have to go to the hospital for 10 days are paying \$2750 instead of \$992—that is not an advantage!

With regard to home health benefits, Medicare charges no copayment for these services as recipients tend to be the most frail, elderly women who are often widows and living on very low fixed incomes. Yet many MA plans charge a 20 percent copayment for home health. They also impose tough utilization review standards to further restrict access to this needed benefit for our most at-risk beneficiaries.

Attached is a chart which further highlights how beneficiary cost sharing for various services in a variety of MA plans surpasses Medicare's cost-sharing for those same services. It is just an illustrative sampling.

The Medicare Advantage Truth in Advertising Act would fix this problem. It would require MA plans to cover all of Medicare's benefits with no greater cost-sharing than is charged in the traditional fee-for-service Medicare program. It would preserve the ability of MA plans to use flat copayments and per diem rates in lieu of deductibles and co-insurance charged in traditional Medicare, but it would prohibit their costs from exceeding the overall fee-for-service cost. In other words, it holds private plans to their propaganda that they're an advantage.

This is a simple bill. It holds Medicare Advantage plans to their word and assures Medicare beneficiaries that they won't face higher out of pocket costs if they choose to join one of the private plan options so heavily promoted in Medicare today.

With thousands of different MA plans out there and numerous complaints being filed about inappropriate and illegal sales techniques, the least we can do is assure Medicare beneficiaries that they'll still be eligible for Medicare-covered services at no more than Medicare prices.

I developed this bill in direct response to testimony presented by Medicare beneficiary advocates before our Ways and Means Health Subcommittee this year. I am pleased that numerous groups support this bill, including the National Committee to Preserve Social Security and Medicare, the Medicare Rights Center, Consumers Union, the Alliance for Retired Americans, the Center for Medicare Advocacy, Families USA, the National Senior Citizens Law Center and California Health Advocates.

I urge you to join me in support of this common sense improvement to the Medicare Advantage program.

IN REMEMBRANCE OF EDOUARD
BRUNNER

HON. ALCEE L. HASTINGS

OF FLORIDA

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. HASTINGS of Florida. Madam Speaker, I rise today in remembrance of a dear international colleague who passed away this weekend.

A world renowned diplomat, Edouard Brunner began his career in the Swiss Foreign Ministry in 1956. Rising through the ranks, he served as the Swiss Secretary of State from 1984 to 1989. He then went on to serve as Ambassador to the United States from 1989 to 1993.

In 1991, U.N. Secretary-General Javier Perez de Cuellar appointed him to a parallel role as his special envoy to the Middle East, replacing Gunnar Yarring of Sweden. Following this position, he served as Special Representative of the Secretary General of the UN for Abkhazia from 1993 and 1994, where he led a U.N. mission that brokered a truce ending 2 years of fighting between the Georgian government and separatists in the Black Sea province of Abkhazia.

He is often cited for coming out of retirement in 1998 to address concerns related to his beloved country during the Nazi era, which with his involvement, provided an acceptable solution to the international community.

However, it is through our work within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in

Europe (OSCE) that I came to know him. Appointed to head the Swiss mission in 1972, Brunner played a key role within the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), which served as a multilateral forum for dialogue and negotiation between the East and West and culminated in the Helsinki Final Act in 1975. In 1994, the CSCE changed its name, becoming the OSCE. Over the years, in a testament to his dedication to the organization and its standing in the world, Brunner remained active within the OSCE both formally and informally.

In 2005, during my presidency of the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly, Brunner and I, in his capacity as chairman of the Swiss Foundation for World Affairs, held a Colloquium on the Future of the OSCE. A report on the findings of the colloquium was then provided as a report to the then-OSCE Chairman-in-Office, Slovenian Foreign Minister Dimitrij Rupel.

A major goal of the colloquium and subsequent report was to give new impetus to political dialogue and provide strategic vision for the OSCE. The initial purpose of the Helsinki Accords had been to expand cooperation in the areas of security, economic, and humanitarian affairs.

Additionally, for the first time, it afforded a systematic review of human rights practices in the Soviet Union and all other signatories of the accords.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of independent states from its territories, spanning from Europe into Asia, questions of the expanding role of the OSCE in politico-military, election observation, and relationships with other multilateral organizations were being raised.

Working together, Brunner and I were not only able to encourage and host the colloquium, but also actively succeeded in addressing those concerns, and establishing a path forward that addressed the new challenges of the 56 participating states of the OSCE.

In my current role as chairman of the Commission on Security and Cooperation Europe, I will sorely miss Brunner's counsel at the OSCE, but know that his memory will live on through his extraordinary contributions to this organization that has been instrumental to peace and security here in the United States as well as throughout Europe. He will not be forgotten.

HONORING NICK SWYKA FOR HIS
DEDICATED SERVICE

HON. JOHN ABNEY CULBERSON

OF TEXAS

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, June 28, 2007

Mr. CULBERSON. Madam Speaker, I rise to recognize and commend the tireless public service of a dedicated and talented member of my staff, Nick Swyka. Nick has worked in my office for 4 years, the first 2 as a Legislative Assistant and the last 2 as my District Director, and he is one of the most intelligent and hard-working staffers I have had the privilege to employ.

Nick was born and raised in Houston, attended St. John's School and graduated from Georgetown University's School of Foreign Service with a degree in International Political

Economy. He was 1 of the approximately 650 students across the country who earned a perfect score on their SATs each year. Nick will be attending the Red McCombs School of Business at the University of Texas this fall and he will be sorely missed, but his contributions to his hometown and the people of Houston will not be forgotten.

Nick has carried on the tradition of outstanding public service established by my first

District Director, Jan Crow. He has conducted himself with the same dignity and professionalism as his predecessor, and his calm demeanor and sharp wit have served him well in his role as my representative in the district. Nick brought the right mix of policy savvy, well-honed political instincts and strength of character to the job, and he excelled at building relationships throughout the district.

We, as Members of Congress, trust our staffs to handle many of the day to day operations of our offices. I was always confident that my district staff was setting new and higher standards for constituent service with Nick Swyka as my District Director. I am equally confident that Nick will achieve each and every goal he sets for himself, and that he will continue to be an active and engaged participant in our democracy.