

"Year of Polio Awareness" Resolution Passes Unanimously

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Congressman Rothman's "Year of Polio Awareness" Resolution Passes

Resolution Builds On New Jersey's Efforts to Stop the Resurgence of Polio

Floor Statement: Rep. Rothman in Support of His Resolution

"In some way the polio vaccination has become a victim of its own success, one might say, with many Americans believing that polio has been eradicated. They no longer have their children vaccinated against this virus. That is a mistake."

Read Rep. Rothman's full remarks on the floor of the House of Representatives.

(Washington, DC)—Today, despite a deeply-divided Congress, Representative Steve Rothman (D-NJ) secured a bipartisan victory for America's children and polio survivors in response to concern about the global resurgence of polio. H.Res.526, Rothman's resolution to designate October 1, 2006 through September 30, 2007 as the "Year of Polio Awareness," passed unanimously in the House of Representatives. The resolution also recognizes the need to vaccinate every child against polio.

"Awareness is the first step to prevention. While many Americans believe that Polio has been eradicated worldwide, that is simply not true. Last year, polio flared in India, Nigeria, and Indonesia, as well as countries that were considered polio-free, such as Namibia. Thousands of new cases were reported, including six in the United States. That is why I am fighting to bring national attention to the rise in polio cases and to ensure that parents understand the importance of vaccinating their children against this still-present and paralyzing virus," said Rothman.

The U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC) report that 10% of U.S. children under three, which is about one million toddlers, are not vaccinated against Polio. In Newark, the only New Jersey city for which CDC data are available, 14% of children remain unvaccinated. With the rise in international travel and the resurgence of polio abroad, health officials are concerned about an outbreak in the United States.

Dr. Richard Bruno, internationally-recognized polio expert and director of The Post-Polio Institute at Englewood Hospital and Medical Center, posed the following question: "Since the poliovirus can be carried silently by people who show no symptoms, what happens if a polio-infected child lands in a densely-populated city like New York, where an estimated 23,000 toddlers are unvaccinated? Answer: America's next polio epidemic."

In response to concerns about a U.S. outbreak, New Jersey Governor Jon Corzine proclaimed September 2006 "Polio Vaccination Month" and the New Jersey Department of Health has launched a polio awareness program thanks to a bill introduced by State Senator Loretta Weinberg.

"New Jersey has long been a leader on issues demanding national attention," said Rothman. "I applaud Governor Corzine, Senator Weinberg, and others for addressing polio awareness head-on and encourage other states interested in my resolution to look at New Jersey's efforts as a model."

"Late Effects" of Polio Also Addressed

In addition to urging polio vaccinations for all children, Rothman's bill also calls for education about Post-Polio Sequelae (PPS), the unexpected and often disabling symptoms that occur in mid-life among the 1.63 million American survivors of the polio epidemics of the 1940s, '50s, and early '60s. "PPS symptoms include overwhelming fatigue, muscle weakness, muscle and joint pain, sleep disorders, and difficulty swallowing and breathing," explains Dr. Bruno. "An alarming number of medical professionals - and even polio survivors themselves - don't know PPS exists and that treatment is available and effective."

Rep. Rothman's bill, introduced last November, passed the U.S. Senate later that year in a companion bill co-sponsored by then-Senator Jon Corzine (D-NJ).

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