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Washington, DC -- Congressman Steve Rothman (D-NJ) voted against the Republican House leadership's assault on America's environment and a real Patients' Bill of Rights. In the 24 hours before leaving for their August recess, the Republican leadership forced through partisan votes on an energy bill which includes drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and a Patients' Bill of Rights that would weaken existing protections under New Jersey law. "I want our country to have a responsible energy policy and a real Patients' Bill of Rights," Rothman said.

"Unfortunately, the Republican leadership in the White House and the Congress has pursued policies that may satisfy the oil and insurance industries, but go against the interests of the overwhelming majority of the American people." Rothman voted to remove drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from the energy bill. He also voted for energy conservation by supporting an amendment to increase the fuel efficiency of Sport Utility Vehicles (SUVs). If SUVs could go further on a gallon of gas- which is possible using current technology- it would result in fuel savings of over one million barrels of oil per day, more oil than would be produced in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"Drilling in the Alaskan Wilderness would destroy one of America's most beautiful environments for a six-month supply of oil," Rothman said. "At the same time, the Republicans have ignored conservation efforts that would use existing technology to make SUVs go farther on a gallon of gas and save consumers money at the pump."

Rothman also opposed a Republican alternative to the Patients' Bill of Rights. Under the Republican version of the bill, the insurance industry would receive protection from liability not enjoyed by any other industry. Additionally, the Republican bill weakens existing protections by superceding state law, such as New Jersey's Health Care Accountability Act recently passed on a bipartisan basis by the legislature and signed by New Jersey's Governor.

"The House Republican bill would put patients in a worse position and it would weaken New Jersey's law," Rothman said. "HMOs are the only industry in America who are not held responsible when their decision hurt, or even kill, patients. No industry should have that type of protection."

The Republican bill would wreck New Jersey's Health Care Accountability Act by requiring all lawsuits to be subject to federal standards that would supersede states' standards. This would make it even harder for patients to hold HMOs accountable.

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[Go back](#)