

prescription drugs, placing an increasing financial burden on the taxpayers and beneficiaries who finance it. Congress plays a vital role in overseeing Medicare and solving these fiscal challenges so that the program remains secure for current and future beneficiaries. MedPAC serves as an important source of information and advice to the Congress as it exercises that oversight. To enable MedPAC to best advise the Congress on how to address the problems stemming from the high and rising costs of prescription drugs, I am writing to request a narrow change in law that would grant MedPAC staff access to important drug pricing and rebate data that other congressional agencies are already able to use. The change in statute is necessary because MedPAC is unable to access the data under existing statutory authority.

MedPAC uses a wide variety of data in order to support the Congress' oversight of Medicare, and the Commission has a strong track record of protecting different types of proprietary and confidential information. For example, MedPAC uses and keeps secure the bids that private insurance plans submit under Medicare Parts C and D, data that Medicare Advantage plans submit on encounters between beneficiaries and their health care providers, and data on beneficiaries' use of prescription drugs.

To ensure that the Congress has comprehensive and up-to-date information, MedPAC strives to use all available data pertinent to our analyses. The Commission uses these data to provide information to the Congress on spending by Medicare and its beneficiaries and to help the Congress develop policies to improve the value of taxpayer dollars used to finance the program. MedPAC delivers this information in mandated reports, congressional testimony, and frequent briefings to congressional staff.

The large growth in drug spending has been a key contributor to the financial strain on Medicare and its beneficiaries. Today, Medicare spends more than \$100 billion annually on prescription drugs under Parts B and D, and beneficiaries are exposed to more than \$20 billion in cost sharing liability. Of particular concern is the growing number of beneficiaries who are exposed to very large cost sharing amounts when they take extremely high-priced drugs.

Despite broad data access under its authorizing statute, MedPAC is unable to access important drug pricing and rebate information under Medicare Parts B and D, and under Medicaid, because of how specific places of the Social Security Act are constructed (for example, MedPAC is not specifically named in Section 1927(b)(3)(D) of the Social Security Act as one of the entities with access to certain data detailing how much the Medicare program and its beneficiaries pay for prescription drugs). Because we lack these important data, we have been limited in the analysis and information we can provide to the Congress as it grapples with how to bring down the prices of drugs for beneficiaries and taxpayers. A statutory change giving us access to these data would enhance our capabilities for assisting the Congress on issues related to prescription drug costs.

With these data, MedPAC staff could:

Assist Congress in understanding the true costs (net of rebates) of prescription drugs to beneficiaries and taxpayers under the Medicare program.

Evaluate different policy options that aim to bring down the prices of drugs and the cost sharing that beneficiaries face for their medicines at the point of sale.

Provide insight into how Part D plans manage the growth in drug prices.

Analyze the effects of market entry and competition on drug prices.

MedPAC looks forward to continuing to support the Congress in developing approaches to payment that ensure beneficiary access to important therapies, while reducing costs for the Medicare program and its beneficiaries. I very much appreciate your consideration of this request for this statutory change, and I also appreciate the support that the Congress has long given to the Commission.

Sincerely,

FRANCIS J. CROSSON, M.D.,
Chairman.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, this bill continues the work of the Energy and Commerce Committee last Congress where we marked up a discussion draft of this very bill at the Health Subcommittee, which I chaired. Drug pricing remains an issue for patients in the United States and this bill will allow the House to act on factual analysis and recommendations to help lower drug prices for Americans.

Mr. Speaker, I urge fellow Members to support H.R. 1781, and I reserve the balance of my time.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I reserve the balance of my time.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I am pleased to yield 5 minutes to the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. CARTER), the principal author of this bill and a valuable member of the Health Subcommittee of the Committee on Energy and Commerce.

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I thank the gentleman for yielding.

Mr. Speaker, I rise to speak in support of my bill, H.R. 1781, the Payment Commission Data Act.

Last year, the Medicare Payment Advisory Commission, MedPAC, and the Medicaid and CHIP Payment Advisory Commission, MACPAC, who serve as nonpartisan advisory panels to Congress, came to us with a problem: They did not have the data needed to fully study prescription drug rebates.

This bill ensures MedPAC and MACPAC have access to the data they need to make informed recommendations to Congress. This increase in transparency is extremely helpful in allowing MedPAC and MACPAC to analyze how competition in our drug market is currently working and how part D plans are managing the growth in drug prices. They will be able to turn that new knowledge into improved policy recommendations on how we, as Congress, can bring down the price of drugs for patients.

Simply put, this bill is just good governance.

Importantly, I think this bill, as well as the bill we just spoke about, H.R. 2115, are shining examples of what is possible when Republicans and Democrats are working together to lower the cost of drugs for patients.

In the Energy and Commerce Committee, we have worked all year to advance a number of good, bipartisan drug policies that could make a difference for patients.

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Looking across the Capitol, there are dozens more bipartisan reforms that I

think could get robust support here in the House.

The issue of prescription drug costs is simply too important to be sacrificed in the name of electoral politics. Today is proof that we can, in fact, pass bipartisan drug pricing reforms.

So I call on my colleagues on the other sides of the aisle: Let's build on today and continue advancing the bipartisan policies we know can become law and actually make a difference for patients in the country.

I want to thank my friend and colead, Representative TOM O'HALLERAN, as well as Representatives RICE, PANETTA, GIANFORTE, and WELCH for their leadership on this bill.

I urge my fellow Members to support transparency in our drug supply chain and to support H.R. 1781.

Mr. BURGESS. Mr. Speaker, I urge support of the underlying bill, and I yield back the balance of my time.

Ms. SCHAKOWSKY. Mr. Speaker, I yield myself the balance of my time.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to point out that this evening, early evening and now, we have passed a total of five pieces of legislation, a couple of which were also out of the Ways and Means Committee. I think it is a tremendous success and a bipartisan success.

So I want to thank Chairman FRANK PALLONE and the chair of the Health Subcommittee, ANNA ESHOO; Ranking Member WALDEN and ranking member of the Health Subcommittee, Mr. BURGESS, for their hard work.

But I also do want to just take a moment to thank the staff on both sides of the aisle. On the Democratic staff we have: Stephen Holland, Jacquelyn Bolen, Kimberlee Trzeciak, Una Lee, Tiffany Guarascio, and Waverly Gordon.

These bills will strengthen our healthcare workforce and increase transparency in prescription drug prices. They are all critical. I am very proud that we were able to work in a bipartisan way to, hopefully, right now, have them pass.

Mr. Speaker, I yield back the balance of my time.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The question is on the motion offered by the gentlewoman from Illinois (Ms. SCHAKOWSKY) that the House suspend the rules and pass the bill, H.R. 1781, as amended.

The question was taken; and (two-thirds being in the affirmative) the rules were suspended and the bill, as amended, was passed.

A motion to reconsider was laid on the table.

HONORING ANITA CLARK

(Mr. PAYNE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. PAYNE. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to honor Anita Clark, the 2019 Reverend Fred Handy In-Service Award winner.

Ms. Clark was honored on October 25 by the Montclair, New Jersey, branch of the NAACP. Few honorees have been more dedicated to serving the public good.

Ms. Clark has spent her entire life helping the underserved and the most vulnerable residents of Essex County. She started in child development at the Newark Day Care Center. She has worked for social services and served as the director of a needs-based youth summer camp.

During her 30 years in the Essex County judicial system, she helped single mothers get child support and worked to keep juveniles from becoming criminals.

She is a respected and beloved resident of my district, as well as a great friend and family member and a loved one, and this honor is well-deserved.

We are very proud of the work that Ms. Anita Clark has done for her community throughout her time in Essex County.

RECOGNIZING HANCOCK DAY SCHOOL ON WINNING THE BLUE RIBBON SCHOOL AWARD

(Mr. CARTER of Georgia asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. CARTER of Georgia. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to recognize Hancock Day School for being recognized by the Department of Education as a Blue Ribbon School for 2019. This prestigious award recognized around 350 schools across the country for their commitment to academic excellence and closing the achievement gap among diverse groups of students.

To commemorate this award, Hancock Day School will receive a flag that is a symbol of excellence in teaching and learning. Recognized throughout the Savannah community as a stalwart of quality education, I am proud to see Hancock receive the national recognition it deserves.

The school was founded in 1953 and serves pre-K through eighth grade students. Using the "Hancock Way," teachers are given autonomy to teach free of busywork and red tape while they push their students to succeed and refuse to water down any part of the curriculum.

The school's founder once said that students need to "grow a little new wood each day," and they are certainly succeeding.

To teachers, students, and staff alike at Hancock Day School: Congratulations on your award, and keep up the good work.

SURFSIDE-SUNSET BEACH NOURISHMENT PROJECT

(Mr. ROUDA asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. ROUDA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to highlight the importance of

the Surfside-Sunset Beach Nourishment Project to the residents of Orange County, California.

Due to flood control measures and other shore protection and harbor works made by the Federal Government, the 17-mile-long shoreline between Anaheim Bay and Newport Bay no longer receives a natural supply of sand.

As a result, Congress authorized the Surfside-Sunset project in 1962 to provide for artificial beach nourishment to stabilize affected shoreline. Stage 13 of this project will combat continued coastline erosion and protect coastal property.

Unfortunately, the Federal Government has neglected the Surfside-Sunset project in recent years, which has prevented stage 13 from moving forward. This project has not been funded by the Federal Government for 11 years. Let me repeat—11 years.

As the Surfside-Sunset project is one of many more Army Corps projects for the people of Orange County, I will continue to advocate for its prioritization by the Army Corps and Congress.

RECOGNIZING THE IMPORTANCE OF THE FOREST PRODUCTS INDUSTRY

(Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. THOMPSON of Pennsylvania. Mr. Speaker, last week, we celebrated Timber Innovation Day and National Forest Products Week.

The forest products industry plays an important role in many communities around the Nation, including Pennsylvania, which is blessed with some of the finest hardwoods in the world. In 2018, U.S. hardwood exports were valued at \$135 billion and employed roughly 700,000 people, nationwide.

In addition to its significant economic footprint, the industry also provides numerous environmental benefits because managed forests support proactive stewardship.

Unfortunately, times have been difficult for many timber producers in recent years. While the industry continues to diversify and trade negotiations progress, identifying new markets for American forest products remains essential.

The Timber Renovation Act, which was included in the 2018 farm bill, is one initiative I have been proud to support that does just that. It encourages new markets by supporting research for wood products in construction.

Mr. Speaker, I would like to thank our producers for the work that they do.

RECOGNIZING HABITAT FOR HUMANITY IN SALEM COUNTY, NEW JERSEY

(Mr. VAN DREW asked and was given permission to address the House for 1

minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. VAN DREW. Mr. Speaker, I am here today to draw attention to the Habitat for Humanity organization of Salem County in south Jersey.

Habitat for Humanity in Salem County, south Jersey, has been active since its creation in 1982. As one of the oldest branches, they have built over 40 homes, with many more in progress.

In addition, Habitat for Humanity in Salem County has a branch of ReStore, which promotes sustainability in home improvement by selling new and gently used materials and furniture.

I want to acknowledge their dedication to our community and to the welfare of those around them. The Habitat for Humanity nonprofit organization has made great strides in our district by building and renovating homes so that more citizens can have access to affordable housing.

We are all proud of them in south Jersey, proud of what they have done. They are truly stars and truly have made a difference in individuals' lives.

May God bless them.

CELEBRATING OXI DAY

(Mr. BILIRAKIS asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend his remarks.)

Mr. BILIRAKIS. Mr. Speaker, I rise today in recognition and celebration of Oxi Day.

Seventy-nine years ago today, the Greek Prime Minister, Ioannis Metaxas, replied, "oxi," or "no," to the fascist forces looking to enter Greece initially in their quest for total conquest of the continent. With this historic response, Greece rejected submission to the Axis Powers, proving it would not go easy.

Though the invasion of the Greek homeland ultimately happened, the fascist forces could not contend with the ferocity of the Greek resistance. The delayed invasion marked the first Axis setback in the entire war and actually precipitated a fatal delay in the German invasion of Russia, serving as the turning point for Allied Powers during World War II.

Mr. Speaker, I celebrate the bravery and resistance of Greek warriors, which serves as an example for all freedom-loving people.

HONORING THE LIFE OF JOHN CONYERS

(Ms. JACKSON LEE asked and was given permission to address the House for 1 minute and to revise and extend her remarks.)

Ms. JACKSON LEE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to join my colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus and the many Members of the United States Congress in honoring John Conyers.

I look forward, over the next couple of weeks, to paying tribute to him on this floor, for he is deserving of the