

(Mr. KELLER) heard testimony from government, medical and other witnesses about the cost of prescription drug abuse, the benefits afforded by these drugs, and how best to balance these two. But more must be done to ensure in striking this balance that we enforce the law, that we educate people about how to avoid such addiction, and more treatment specifically targeted towards such addiction.

Prescription drug abuse presents special problems for the government, the medical community, and the pharmaceutical industry. On the one hand these powerful and dangerous drugs, with as great a capacity for addiction and abuse as heroin and cocaine, even though they have that potential, there are many ways for these drugs which have legitimate uses to fall in the wrong hands. Supplies of the drugs can be stolen from pharmacies and manufacturers and then sold back in the black market; doctors may intentionally or unintentionally over prescribe the drugs to patients, leading to addiction and abuse; or patients themselves may obtain illegal quantities of the drugs by shopping for multiple prescriptions and filling them at multiple pharmacies.

On the other hand, these drugs have legitimate medical uses and may give the only possibility of relief for patients suffering from severe chronic pain. Many cancer patients rely on OxyContin and similar drugs.

But however difficult it may be to strike a balance, we must find a way to further enforce the laws so we do not have this exploding abuse of these drugs that are crippling many families and individuals and leading to the death of many others.

Prescription drug abuse is a very serious problem. According to the most recent study conducted by the Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration, SAMHSA, in 2002, over 1.9 million Americans aged 12 or older had used OxyContin alone for nonmedical, in other words illegal, purposes. Prescription drug abuse is far more widespread than cocaine, heroin or ecstasy abuse. Only marijuana is more widely abused by Americans. The problem is particularly acute among our young people. For example, among 12- and 13-year-olds, more children abuse prescription drugs than even marijuana.

One of the first things that became clear to me during the hearing is that the Federal Government needs to obtain and share better information on how these drugs are falling into the wrong hands. One newspaper reported that the top 12 OxyContin prescribers under Medicaid in Florida wrote prescriptions totaling over \$15 million. While that is a very large number, it does not include all of the non-Medicaid prescriptions. The government has no practical way of keeping track of who is prescribing these drugs, in what amounts, and to whom.

A number of States and many of my colleagues have proposals for setting

up a computerized database to keep track of these drugs. While some may raise privacy concerns about such a database, if we do not get this information to law enforcement, we will never get a handle on the problem.

Second, there are simply too many ways for these drugs to fall into the wrong hands. As the gentleman from Georgia (Mr. NORWOOD) noted at the hearing, it is possible for children to go on the Internet and order OxyContin or other opiates without going to a physician. Even when children do not do that, they can often get the drugs by raiding their parents' medicine cabinets or getting them from their friends. We need more effective regulations and education to cut down on these very real and dangerous routes of drug diversion.

I am encouraged by the recent decision of the DEA to explore putting hydrocodone combination drugs, which are based on another drug similar to oxycodone, on Schedule II to reflect their real potential for abuse. I hope the DEA, FDA and other agencies will continue to reexamine their strategies to find more effective ways to combat this problem.

Finally, while it is clear that there are widely diverging opinions about what kinds of conditions these drugs are prescribed for, it is equally clear that the more uses the government approves, the more abuse we will have. There is a great deal of debate about whether OxyContin should be prescribed for moderate as opposed to severe pain. We will see this debate in connection with nearly every powerful drug because there will always be those who wish to push the envelope and approve the drug for more and more people, thus creating more and more potential for addiction and abuse.

Those of my colleagues who consider themselves sympathetic to so-called "medical marijuana" should take heed of this. While many of its proponents claim that marijuana would only be used medicinally, it is also used by many others for less serious conditions.

HONORING JOE LAMANTIA, JR.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Texas (Mr. HINOJOSA) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. HINOJOSA. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to congratulate my good friend and constituent Joe LaMantia, Jr., for being named the 2004 Border Texan of the Year. This is an honor given only to those whose record of service in south Texas is a model for all Americans. The award is given in conjunction with Hidalgo County's annual Border Fest, a heritage and cultural festival that celebrates the uniqueness and diversity of south Texas.

I can think of no one more deserving of this award than Joe LaMantia, Jr. Joe is a first-generation American with deep roots in South Texas. Following

in his father's footsteps, Joe began his successful agricultural career in south Texas in Carrizo Springs. His agriculture operation consisted of pecan orchards, vegetables, and a cow-calf operation, plus a vegetable and fruit farm operation in Mexico and Chile. In 1965, he moved his family to the Rio Grande Valley to continue their agricultural business.

Due to the unpredictability of agriculture, the LaMantias made a transition into the beer distribution business as wholesalers of Anheuser-Busch products. That was the beginning of the LaMantia family-owned and operated business of L&F Distributors. The company began in 1977 in McAllen, Texas, with 11 employees. I witnessed a fast learning curve by the LaMantias. Today, L&F Distributors has grown to employ over 600 individuals in 22 counties in the great State of Texas.

Despite the demands of a growing and successful business, Joe has dedicated himself to improving the quality of life in his community. In 1974, Joe was appointed by Governor Dolph Brisco to the board of the Texas Department of Corrections. He was reappointed in 1983 by Governor Mark White, and served as the vice chair for over 10 years.

During his tenure, Joe saw firsthand the problems facing the Texas border region, specifically poverty, crime and high unemployment. He recognized that education was the key to improving these challenges faced by the community. A champion of educational opportunity, Joe established one of the first scholarships for women athletes at the University of Texas Pan American, the Ann LaMantia Anheuser-Busch Outstanding Woman Athlete Scholarship.

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The scholarship was named in honor of his wife of 30 years, Ann LaMantia, who passed away in 1983. Ann LaMantia served on the board of regents at Pan American University and, like her husband, was committed to higher education for the students of south Texas.

Since her passing, the LaMantias have continued to be dedicated to providing college scholarship opportunities for local students. Under Joe's leadership, L&F Distributors formed a partnership with the Hispanic Scholarship Fund in 1994 and in 8 years has raised over \$5 million and awarded over 2,600 scholarships to students in south Texas. In 2002, L&F Distributors was recognized by the national organization as the largest contributing Anheuser-Busch distributor to the HSF.

That same year, the LaMantias created a local educational nonprofit organization, the South Texas Academic Rising Scholars (STARS) Foundation, which provides scholarship awards to students in south Texas to attend the college of their choice. Joe serves as the founder and chairman of the board of directors, and in less than 17 months STARS has managed to raise over \$2

million for south Texas students and has become the premier scholarship foundation in south Texas.

Mr. Speaker, this successful scholarship program has doubled the number of students who can have access to higher education. Joe, Jr. and his wife, Derrelene, have seven children and 26 grandchildren and consider their close-knit family their greatest asset. Joe is one of the hardest working entrepreneurs in south Texas. He is honest and a man of integrity, and I am proud to call him my friend. He truly deserves to be the Border Texan of the Year.

I urge my colleagues to join me in commending Joe LaMantia, Jr. for his tireless efforts on behalf of children and in congratulating him on receiving this prestigious award.

The SPEAKER pro tempore (Mr. BISHOP of Utah). Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Iowa (Mr. KING) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. KING of Iowa addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak in the gentleman from Iowa's (Mr. KING) stead.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Is there objection to the request of the gentleman from Illinois?

There was no objection.

ENDING MERCURY POLLUTION

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Illinois (Mr. KIRK) is recognized for 5 minutes.

Mr. KIRK. Mr. Speaker, the Congress and the President are preparing for a major debate on reducing air pollution. In this debate, partisans for and against greater environmental protection are both right. And they are both wrong.

The environmental community is correct in highlighting the growing danger of mercury pollution. Once considered an "average" pollutant, the EPA's Children Health Protection Advisory Committee warned last month that mercury is a powerful neurotoxin that accumulates in humans. Just one-twenty-fifth of a teaspoon of mercury can contaminate a 25-acre lake. Blood tested from Illinois pregnant women showed that they averaged 14 times the naturally occurring level of mercury in their blood.

Coal-burning power plants that have not yet been required to reduce their mercury emissions are the major source of this pollution. The Federal Government already requires all municipal incinerators and other sources of air pollution to scrub their emissions to remove most mercury. Raw po-

litical power and threatened litigation have delayed such requirements for coal-fired plants.

Enough of the delays. We need to clean up mercury pollution today. In eastern States, downwind from the rest of the Nation, mercury levels in the water are rising. The National Wildlife Federation recently released a study showing that the rainwater falling on suburban Chicago communities contained three times the naturally occurring level of mercury. With higher levels of mercury poisoning than other regions of the country, New England and the Great Lakes are becoming mercury "hot spots." This poses a threat to the Great Lakes, a critical ecosystem that is the source of drinking water for over 20 million Americans.

The scientific debate about the danger of mercury poisoning is now over. The real question is, how quickly can we reduce such pollution? When the Clean Air Act was written, there was little thought to how best to control pollution. The act imposed a rigid set of 1970s controls on each source of pollution, with many opportunities for polluters to challenge any action by the government in court. The worst example of what followed is the Federal Superfund cleanup program. Today, over half of all Superfund environmental cleanup dollars have been spent paying lawyers and not protecting the environment.

There is a better method. In the 1980s, the program to reduce acid rain was based not on endless court litigation, but on a system of tradeable credits that restrict the total output of pollution in a way that is more flexible than the litigious old regulatory system. The acid rain pollution credit trading system is a great success, leading to more environmental cleanup and less courtroom cost. This system cuts acid rain pollution in a way that is faster and cheaper than the old regulatory approach. President Bush proposes using such a system based on acid rain to also reduce mercury pollution. His approach could be effective but needs two major amendments by environmentalists here in the Congress.

First, the President's proposal allows more mercury pollution under a trading system than the old regulatory approach. Trading credits can be allowed but Congress must reduce the supply of tradeable credits to dramatically cut mercury pollution to levels at or below which would have been allowed under the old system.

Second, a flexible system also carries a danger for areas already contaminated with mercury. If credits to emit mercury can be purchased in an already polluted area, a trading system could worsen mercury hot spots that already exist. Congress should clearly define mercury hot spots, and we should allow emissions credits to be sent outside such a zone but not to be purchased to contaminate inside.

These two changes, restricting the supply of mercury emissions credits

and higher environmental protection for mercury hot spot zones, could make a program modeled after the acid rain program work to reduce mercury pollution in our country. This is the kind of bipartisan approach that takes the best aspects of both sides to focus taxpayer dollars on cutting pollution rather than killing time in court.

Whatever the outcome of this debate, one thing should be agreed by bipartisan majorities in the Congress: the days of unregulated pollution from coal-burning power plants should be over. Period. The science is now clear and convincing that mercury pollution from such emissions represents a clear and present danger to the mothers and children of North America.

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Ms. LEE) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. LEE addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Nebraska (Mr. TERRY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. TERRY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Pennsylvania (Mr. MURPHY) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MURPHY addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from the District of Columbia (Ms. NORTON) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Ms. NORTON addressed the House. Her remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from Florida (Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. MARIO DIAZ-BALART of Florida addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Under a previous order of the House, the gentleman from California (Mr. GEORGE MILLER) is recognized for 5 minutes.

(Mr. GEORGE MILLER of California addressed the House. His remarks will appear hereafter in the Extensions of Remarks.)

EXCHANGE OF SPECIAL ORDER TIME

Mr. MCDERMOTT. Mr. Speaker, I ask unanimous consent to speak in place of