

Rothman Urges Vote on His Bill (The CARE Act) to Prevent Unintended Pregnancies

For Immediate Release: March 7, 2006

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Rothman Calls for End to Partisan Politics on Women's Health Issues; Urges Vote on His Bill to Prevent Unintended Pregnancies

Rothman's CARE Act Would Require Federally-Funded Hospitals to Offer Rape Victims Emergency Contraception

(Washington, DC)—Today, Representative Steve Rothman (D-NJ) called on Speaker of the House Dennis Hastert to stop playing politics with women's health and allow a vote on his bipartisan legislation to make emergency contraceptive (EC) available to rape survivors in the emergency room, known as "EC in the ER," and prevent an estimated 22,000 unintended pregnancies each year.

Rothman's bill, HR 2928, the "Compassionate Assistance for Rape Emergencies (CARE) Act," specifically requires federally-funded hospitals to provide a victim of sexual assault with accurate, unbiased information about EC, offer it to her, and make it available upon request, even if she cannot pay for it.

"By providing access to emergency contraception immediately, hospitals could help alleviate some of the trauma associated with rape and eliminate the heart-wrenching decision on whether to have an abortion that thousands of survivors face," said Rothman.

Emergency contraception reduces a woman's risk of becoming pregnant by up to 95 percent when taken within 24 hours of unprotected intercourse. Within 72 hours, it is 89% effective and studies show that it can be effective for up to 120 hours, or 5 days. However, its effectiveness decreases by the hour so the longer a woman is denied access to EC, the more likely she is to become pregnant.

"When a woman is rushed to the hospital after being attacked, she is taken to the nearest hospital regardless of its policy on providing emergency contraceptive. I am proud that New Jersey has enacted a state version of my bill, but a sexual assault could occur anywhere and a woman from Jersey shouldn't have to fear being denied compassionate care simply because she leaves the state," added Rothman.

A 2005 nationwide survey published in the Annals of Emergency Medicine found that 42 percent of non-Catholic hospitals and 55 percent of Catholic hospitals do not provide EC under any circumstances, including when a woman has been sexually assaulted. Yet, Rothman's legislation has garnered broad public support, including among individuals who oppose abortion under any circumstances, because EC does not actually terminate a pregnancy.

EC is a higher dosage of regular birth control pills that works by inhibiting ovulation, fertilization, or, in rare cases, implantation before pregnancy can occur. It has no effect once a fertilized egg has been implanted. Other names for EC are "Plan B" or the "Morning After pill." EC is not the same as RU-486, which is a chemical abortion that ends a pregnancy.

"Women in New Jersey and across the country should be very proud of Rep. Rothman for leading this bipartisan effort to provide commonsense, compassionate care to rape survivors in the emergency room," said Nancy Keenan, president of NARAL Pro-Choice America. "When it comes to solving serious problems like unintended pregnancy, Americans want answers from their elected officials, not silence. I stand proudly with Congressman Rothman in calling on Speaker Hastert to allow a vote on his legislation without further delays."

NARAL Pro-Choice America and five other lawmakers joined Rothman to promote his legislation as part of a national "Prevention First: Challenge for Common Ground" press conference. The event highlighted four measures to prevent unwanted pregnancies that the Republican leadership has stalled in committee, including Rothman's. The other three bills are: The Real Education About Life Act, Access to Legal Pharmaceuticals Act, and Equity in Prescription Insurance Contraceptive Coverage Act.

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