

Walden supports common sense college-aged health care legislation

Press Release

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A bill cosponsored by Congressman Greg Walden (R-Ore.) to protect severely ill college students took a significant step forward in Congress today.

The legislation, dubbed “Michelle’s Law,” would ensure that college students do not get kicked off their parents’ medical insurance if they fall severely ill and must take a leave of absence from school. Currently, most health insurance plans only permit students to remain on their parents’ insurance if they are in school full-time. Students who cannot maintain full-time status because of medical reasons are at risk of losing their medical coverage.

“Common sense suggests that if you get sick to the point that you can’t maintain a full class schedule due to medical treatment, then your insurance should cover your medical costs,” Congressman Walden said. “Insurance companies should not use the change in a dependant child’s student status as a reason to drop health insurance all together. Yet right now insurers can drop students who are so ill that they can’t maintain full-time status in college. That’s a double-whammy that’s just plain unfair. I hope the House leadership quickly brings this legislation up for a full vote so we can fix this loophole as soon as possible.”

The legislation, H.R. 2851, would allow full-time students over the age of 18 who fall severely ill to take a certified medical leave of absence from college for up to one year while maintaining their parents’ health insurance. It would require group health plans and insurance plans in the individual market to continue coverage of students who are on a certified medical leave of absence from school for up to one year.

The bill is modeled after a New Hampshire law. Michelle Morse was a full-time student at Plymouth State University when she was diagnosed with colon cancer in late 2003. After Michelle’s doctors recommended that she reduce her course load to accommodate chemotherapy treatments, the Morse family discovered that doing so would cause Michelle to lose her health insurance or require her to make COBRA payments of about \$550 per month (not including co-payments) in addition to family coverage – more than the family could afford. To keep her health insurance, Michelle remained a full-time student. She died on November 10, 2005.

The legislation, H.R. 2851, is supported by the following organizations:

American Cancer Society
Cancer Action Network
America’s Health Insurance Plans
American Heart Association
American Diabetes Association
National Education Association

National Health Council

National Collegiate Athletic Association

Colorectal Cancer Coalition

Leukemia and Lymphoma Society

American College Health Association

National Patient Advocate Foundation

National Association of Social Workers

National Kidney Foundation

American Hospital Association

Congressman Greg Walden represents the people of Oregon's Second Congressional District, which is comprised of 20 counties in eastern, southern, and Central Oregon. He is a member of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, and a member of the Select Committee on Energy Independence and Global Warming.