



Congressman JOHN W. OLVER

Serving Western and Central Massachusetts



Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515



Congressman John W. Olver
First Congressional District
Massachusetts

Dear First District Residents,

The Congress spent much of this past fall providing needed funding for our men and women in the armed services, humanitarian relief in Afghanistan and Pakistan, new federal agents on airplanes and at airport baggage screening and security check points, other homeland security measures and rebuilding efforts in New York and Washington.

We will fully recover from the terrorist attacks of 2001, and our nation will be stronger.

In order to guarantee a bright future for everyone, it is important to address all the unmet needs of American families. **This update is about health care issues, including our new bioterrorism concerns.**

As we work together to keep Americans safe from terrorism, we must not forget about other pressing public concerns. Improving health care has always been one of my top priorities in Congress, and residents of western and central Massachusetts continue to face significant challenges in accessing quality, affordable care.

I plan to spend a great deal of time in 2002 working to make the First District a healthier and safer place for every family. I welcome your input on this important set of issues.

Sincerely,

John W. Olver
MEMBER OF CONGRESS

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Health Care & Bioterrorism

Supporting Nurse Practitioners to Increase Health Care Availability

In order to provide more options for quality health care, I have introduced legislation to require that Medicaid cover primary care services provided by Advanced Practice Registered Nurses (APRNs). APRNs are registered nurses who have attained advanced expertise in practice areas that are often inaccessible for many, such as gerontology, pediatrics, women's health, neonatology, mental health and anesthesiology.

My legislation would restore Medicaid coverage (which was previously available) for the services of pediatric nurse practitioners, family nurse practitioners and certified nurse midwives. The bill also expands Medicaid fee-for-service coverage for all nurse practitioners.

Passage of this measure would expand access to these important health care providers. My bill has been endorsed by the American Nurses Association, the American Academy of Nurse Practitioners and the American College of Nurse Practitioners.

I discussed health care issues with local veterans at the September 8, 2001 grand opening of the new Veterans' Community-Based Outpatient Clinic at the Health Alliance Burbank Hospital in Fitchburg.

Fighting for Better Access to Health Care

As health care costs continue to rise, many providers are leaving rural areas for cities in search of higher Medicare reimbursement rates. This practice denies residents of western and central Massachusetts access to essential health care.



To prevent more HMOs from pulling out of rural Massachusetts — thereby leaving many seniors without adequate health care or prescription drug coverage — I have been working with state officials and my colleagues in Congress to find ways to increase the economic viability of HMOs in western and central Massachusetts.

As a member of the Congressional Caucus on Community Health Centers and the Rural Caucus, another goal of mine is to bring more health care options to my district. Community Health Centers are located in over 3,000 communities nationwide and provide services to countless uninsured and medically underserved, including many residents of the First District. I will work to bring more such Centers and other community health care services to our region.

New Veterans' Outpatient Clinic in Fitchburg



Supporting Better Home Care



On December 4, 2001, Frank Metivier, President of the Franklin County Home Care Corporation (FCHCC)/Area Agency on Aging presented me with FCHCC's 2001 "Keep Seniors in the Budget" award for my legislative work in Congress.

Prescription Drug Re-Importation and a Prescription Drug Benefit Under Medicare



It is outrageous that Americans are denied access to low cost prescription drugs. Prescription drugs in other countries often cost 30-70% less than those sold in the

United States. For example, Tamoxifen, a widely prescribed breast cancer drug, sells in Canada for one-tenth of the price it is sold for in the U.S. Our citizens should not be forced to pay the highest prices in the world to fill their prescriptions!

As an original co-sponsor of H.R. 698, the Prescription Reimportation, Improvement, Correction, and Enhancement Act, I am working to enable individuals to import legal, FDA-approved prescription drugs produced abroad.

I am also pressing for a new prescription drug benefit to be added to Medicare. As a cosponsor of the Medicare Extension of Drugs to Seniors (MEDS) Plan, I strongly support creating a universal, affordable and comprehensive prescription drug benefit for all seniors under Medicare.

Working to Improve Long-Term Care

As average life spans continue to lengthen, the need for long-term care is expected to grow substantially. The number of Americans over age 65 is expected to double in size by 2030.

The National Family Caregiver Support Program, which was enacted by Congress in 2000, authorizes grants to states for counseling, caregiver training, respite care and other services to help take the burden off the caregiver. I strongly supported this initiative and have been working on the Appropriations Committee to increase its annual funding. I am happy to report that the Labor-Health and Human Services-Education appropriations bill for fiscal year 2002 included a funding boost for the Family Caregiver Program.

Tragically, over seventy nursing homes in Massachusetts have closed in the past two years largely due to a woefully inadequate Medicaid reimbursement rate. To address this crisis, I spearheaded a Massachusetts congressional delegation proposal to Governor Swift urging her to distribute more state Medicaid dollars to nursing homes. I will continue to work with my colleagues to protect the financial stability of the long-term care system in our state.

We Need a Real Patients' Bill of Rights!



In August 2001, the House of Representatives passed a so-called "Patients' Bill of Rights" that contained few protections for consumers to ensure quality health care and granted HMOs special exceptions to the protections it purported to offer. I voted AGAINST this wholly inadequate bill.

I support the more consumer-oriented version of patient protection legislation passed by the Senate that empowers physicians and patients to make medical decisions. I will work to ensure that the House-Senate compromise includes the right to choose one's own doctor, guaranteed access to specialists and emergency room services, and access to appeals and effective recourse when a health plan makes harmful decisions.



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Protecting Against Bioterrorism

A mere month after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, we were faced with the reality of another new threat: bioterrorism. As the Postal Service works to upgrade mail facilities to protect against any possible future spread of Anthrax through the mail, other federal agencies are also putting safeguards in place to protect the public.

The Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) is reevaluating the distribution of smallpox vaccinations. HHS has 69 million vaccines on hand and recently ordered 250 million more, ensuring enough for every person in the United States. In conjunction with this

important precautionary measure, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has devised a comprehensive plan to halt the spread of a smallpox outbreak.



As an original cosponsor of the Bioterrorism Protection Act of 2001, I am working with my colleagues to prepare and protect the U.S. from future biological attacks. On December 12, 2001, the House passed a comprehensive legislative package to increase funding to improve our public health infrastructure and increase its capacity to effectively respond to bioterrorism, protect our food and water supplies, and enhance law enforcement officials' ability to prevent and combat bioterrorism.

Standing Together, United



On September 23, 2001, I had the privilege of meeting with many of the patriotic residents of north Worcester County at the annual Johnny Appleseed event in Leominster.