

**STATEMENT OF CONGRESSMAN HENRY A. WAXMAN  
HOUSE GOVERNMENT REFORM COMMITTEE  
“VACCINES: FINDING A BALANCE  
BETWEEN PUBLIC SAFETY AND PERSONAL CHOICE”  
TUESDAY, AUGUST 3, 1999 ~ 2154 RAYBURN HOB**

Mr. Chairman, there are few triumphs in the annals of medicine like vaccination. Vaccines have saved more lives than any other medical intervention in history. Today, they protect us from deadly infectious diseases which spread death, disability, and misery in other, less fortunate parts of the world.

Thanks to universal immunization, the United States has made tremendous progress against polio, diphtheria, whooping cough, and other diseases. According to UNICEF, these diseases kill two and a half million children and cripple 750,000 children worldwide every year. Without vaccination, American children would also be vulnerable to similar catastrophic epidemics.

I don't think American parents would ever permit their children to be exposed to such extreme risks. But today, we are becoming complacent about our success against infectious diseases. Unlike our parents and grandparents, we aren't terrorized every year by paralytic polio and whooping cough epidemics.

This makes it easier to forget the value of vaccines and to focus on their potential risks. But if children are frightened and parents discouraged about vaccines, we will quickly become vulnerable again to infectious disease.

No one doubts that there are adverse reactions to vaccines. It is unfortunate that they happen, and that children and adults suffer as a result. That is why I sponsored the National Childhood Vaccine Injury Act of 1986, which established the National Vaccine Injury Compensation Program. This program relies upon the best available science and medicine to provide an alternative to litigation for

individuals who suffered specific vaccine-related injuries.

Today, we must continue to rely upon what science tells us about the benefits and risks of vaccines. We must continue to educate the public about vaccines, their benefits and risks. While everything we know about childhood vaccines tells us that their benefits far outweigh their risks, we must remain vigilant and continue epidemiological research into potential side effects.

There is a simple way to illustrate the importance of vaccination. Two hundred years ago, Edward Jenner developed the first smallpox vaccine. I was inoculated against smallpox. My children, who were born in the 1960s, were also inoculated.

But those of you who were born in the 1970s do not have a small, round scar that we bear on our shoulders — because you didn't need the smallpox vaccine. Smallpox no longer threatens our children in their beds or whole communities with death. It is just a memory.

Today, we are tantalizingly close to eradicating the second communicable disease in history — polio. But until polio, meningitis, diphtheria, hepatitis and other diseases are truly memories, our children and our families will continue to be at risk. Vaccination will remain an indispensable public health defense and it will be Congress' responsibility to continue to support and encourage universal vaccination

Mr. Chairman, we will hear from families who have suffered either adverse reactions to the vaccine or health problems they believe are linked to the vaccine. We will also hear from the families of those who have experienced the trauma and stigma of infectious disease. I am sympathetic to all of our witnesses and look forward to their testimony.

Unfortunately, however, there are many witnesses that we will not hear from. The minority made a number of requests for witnesses, but only half those requests were granted. We requested to

hear from —

- a doctor who could have talked about efforts to vaccinate world-wide, and the ravages of vaccine-preventable diseases on children around the globe;
- a doctor who has been doing vaccine studies since 1967 and who is an expert on reactions to the pertussis vaccine; and
- a member of the board of directors of the American Academy of Pediatrics.

But these requests were denied.

Many other voices are missing from this discussion. For example, there is no representative from the state health agencies who actually mandate vaccinations and administer vaccine programs. There is no representative from the vaccine manufacturers, who bear a large responsibility for vaccine safety. I deeply regret that these groups are not here today to provide us with balanced and informed testimony.

In conclusion, I wish to submit for the record the positions of leading medical and patient organizations in support of universal vaccination, including the World Health Organization and Pan American Health Organization, American Medical Association, the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials, American Nurses Association, the American Public Health Association, the American Academy of Family Physicians, the Children's Defense Fund, the American Pharmaceutical Association, the Partnership for Prevention, the Bill and Melinda Gates Children's Vaccine Program, the Immunization Action Coalition, Every Child by Two, and the National Foundation for Infectious Diseases..

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