

Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions

Hearing on Women's Health

April 25, 2002

Statement of Senator Carnahan

Mr. Chairman, I would like to commend you for calling for this hearing and for your steadfast leadership on women's health issues.

I want to bring the Committee's attention to a serious health problem that affects women during their reproductive years – uterine fibroids. At least twenty to thirty percent of all women aged 35 and older have symptomatic uterine fibroids that require treatment. This number rises to approximately fifty percent for African-American women.

Given that uterine fibroids affects millions of women and how little we know about it, I believe that it is important to increase research into the disease and also public awareness of it. I am proud to announce that I have introduced the Uterine Fibroids Research and Education Act of 2002, S. 2122.

I would like to recognize two members of this Committee, Senator Mikulski and Senator Jeffords, who are co-sponsoring this legislation. Both are strong advocates for women's health. I appreciate their support on this important issue and look forward to working with them to move the legislation through the HELP Committee as soon as possible.

Uterine fibroids are a benign tumor that impacts the reproductive health of women, particularly minority women. If they go undetected or untreated, uterine fibroids can lead to childbirth complications or infertility, among other things.

For those who do seek treatment, the option prescribed most often is a hysterectomy. Uterine fibroids are the top reason for hysterectomies currently being performed in this country. A hysterectomy is a major operation – the average recovery time is six weeks. This is just the physical impact, the emotional impact lasts much longer.

We need to invest additional resources in research, so that there are more treatment options for women, including options less drastic than a hysterectomy. We also need to increase awareness of uterine fibroids, so that more women will recognize the symptoms and seek treatment. My legislation will provide a sustained federal commitment to better understanding uterine fibroids.

It has two components. First, it authorizes \$10 million for the National Institutes of Health (NIH) for each of four years to conduct research on uterine fibroids.

Second, the bill supports a public awareness campaign. It calls on the Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to carry out a program to provide information and education to the public regarding uterine fibroids. The content of the program shall include information on the incidence and prevalence of uterine fibroids and the elevated risk for minority women. The Secretary shall have the authority to carry out the program either directly or through contract.

This legislation has been endorsed by the Society of Interventional Radiology, the American College of Obstetricians and Gynecologists, the National Uterine Fibroids Foundation, the American College of Surgeons, and the National Medical Association.

This legislation will make a meaningful difference in the lives of women and their families across this country. I encourage the HELP Committee to support this important legislation. Thank you.