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Rep. Garrett Introduces Amendment to Limit Abuse of Federal Tax-Payer Dollars

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Yesterday, Rep. Scott Garrett (NJ-05) offered an amendment to H.R. 5006, the 2005 Labor, Health and Human Services, and Education Appropriations bill, stating that no more than 50 federal employees will be permitted to attend an international conference. This amendment was approved by the House of Representatives.

“My constituents often ask me why Congress continues to spend so much despite the fact that we have a deficit and an ever growing national debt,” Garrett explained. “This amendment represents common sense and fiscal discipline.”

Garrett noted that over 130 federal employees are attending an AIDS conference in Bangkok, Thailand. The total cost of registration for an individual to participate in the conference is \$1,250 of the taxpayer’s money. Over 236 federal employees were sent to a similar conference in Barcelona, Spain in 2002 at a cost of more than \$3 million to the taxpayer.

“For the same cost as the Thailand conference registration fees for 130 federal employees, the U.S. government could have provided a dose of the anti-AIDS drug nevirapine to over 200,000 babies in Africa,” said Garrett. “The average cost for a dose of nevirapine is 75 cents and studies have shown that a single dose given within 24 hours after birth can protect many infants from infection with the AIDS virus.”

In a recent interview, the Kaiser Family Foundation U.S. Global AIDS Coordinator Randall Tobias conceded that the cost of sending many federal employees overseas to attend conferences should be rethought.

“What really needs to be asked is whether or not the value generated by this kind of a conference is worth that kind of money or could that money be spent in a more efficient manner,” said Tobias. “We need to focus more and more of our energy and attention on getting at the implementation of treatment, prevention and care programs. I think there really needs to be some evaluation before the next conference.”

This interview is available on-line: http://www.kaisernetwork.org/health_cast/hcast_index.cfm?display=detail&hc=1175

“While it may be important to send scientists and researchers overseas to attend conferences, I believe 50 people attending a single conference is more than sufficient,” said Garrett. “It would be irresponsible to pass on the cost of these luxuries to the next generation as part of the national debt. Furthermore, if given the choice on how to spend limited resources, we should prioritize the prevention and treatment of AIDS and other diseases rather than these conferences.”

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