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Cancer Patient Arrested at Rep. Polis' Capitol Hill Office, Protesting TPP

As Congress Questions EpiPen Price-Gouging, Cancer Patients and Health Care Professionals Demand That Polis Take a Stand Now Against the 'Death Sentence' Imposed by TPP's Expansion of Medicine Monopolies

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, a cancer patient – supported by health professionals and friends and family of people with cancer – was arrested as she blocked the entrance to Representative Jared Polis' (D-Colo.) Capitol Hill office, demanding that the congressman take a stand against the 'death sentence' imposed by the expansion of medicine monopolies in the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP).

Doctors Without Borders has said the TPP would “go down in history as the worst-ever trade agreement for access to medicines” and is “bad for people needing access to medicines worldwide, including in the U.S.”

Zahara Heckscher, a 51-year-old mother from Washington, D.C., who has been in treatment for advanced breast cancer for four years blocked the entrance to Polis' office and refused to leave. The congressman is one of very few Democrats in the House of Representatives who have not declared opposition to the TPP. He has long claimed to be an advocate for consumers' access to affordable medicine.

As Congress today hauls yet another CEO before an oversight hearing on pharmaceutical industry pricing, this time for EpiPen price-gouging, Heckscher said, “Members of Congress who don't like EpiPen prices should vote against the TPP. The TPP would lock in policies that lead pharmaceutical companies to jack up prices. The high medicine prices the TPP would promote exploit patients, rip off taxpayers, and cost lives.”

Heckscher, the co-founder of Cancer Families for Affordable Medicines (CancerFAM.org), shared the stories of cancer patients and loved ones from Polis' district, who understand firsthand the life-and-death stakes for access to affordable cancer medicines. One of the most controversial aspects of the TPP would require all TPP countries to provide special monopoly rights for biologic medicines, which include many cutting-edge cancer drugs. She chanted that the TPP would be a “death sentence” for many cancer patients by keeping life-saving cancer medicines out of reach due to exorbitant monopoly pricing.

View [royalty-free video and photos](#) of Hecksher's arrest.

This month, Heckscher learned that her insurance rejected her doctor's prescription for her to take Herceptin, a medicine that could cost her family over \$50,000 a year if the decision is not reversed. She noted that, "Six hundred dollars for an EpiPen seems like bargain compared to the prices for the cutting-edge biologic medicines, which would be guaranteed extra monopoly extensions under the TPP. A biosimilar version of Herceptin available in India is not available here in the United States because of policies that delay generics. The TPP will lock in and export these kinds of policies."

The advocates involved with CancerFAM.org refused to leave the office unless Polis would commit to join Democratic presidential nominee Hillary Clinton, House Minority Leader Nancy Pelosi, Senate Minority Leader Harry Reid, and the vast majority of Democratic House members by taking a stand now against the TPP.

"A vote for the TPP is a vote that could effectively take some patients backwards in time to the dark ages of cancer treatment. It will prevent too many people with cancer – and other life threatening illnesses – from accessing the new treatments they need to stay alive," said Heckscher, explaining why she felt compelled to risk arrest at Polis' office today. "One of my current medicines could have cost me \$118,000 per year if I had not qualified for a clinical trial. And now I am at the mercy of my insurance company to decide if I can take a medicine that is still under monopoly protection, which keeps its price obscenely high. The TPP, if passed, would lock in policies in the United States that lead to overpriced medicines and reduce access. We can't allow any member of Congress who claims to care about public health to stand on the sidelines. Rep. Polis must publicly state his opposition to the TPP now."

Matthew Moy, a physician with the American Medical Student Association who attended the action at Polis' office, echoed Heckscher's concerns from the perspective of health care professionals: "Future doctors want to be able to prescribe the medicines our patients need. The TPP could limit our ability to do so. The TPP provisions on intellectual property threaten to keep costs so high they will be out of reach, especially the new, life-saving biologics used to treat cancer and other illnesses."

"Nurses are proud to stand with patients to demand that Congress reject the TPP agreement, an all-out assault on public health and safety in the U.S. and around the world," said Jean Ross, RN, co-president of National Nurses United. "Nurses are particularly appalled at monopoly pricing protections for giant pharmaceutical firms that could be a death sentence for countless patients in need of affordable medications."

The TPP will not take effect unless Congress approves it. Despite opposition by presidential nominees from both parties, the vast majority of congressional Democrats, and a growing bloc of GOP House members, the White House and the business lobby intend to try to push for TPP approval during a "lame-duck" session after the election.

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