

# Rep. Schrader instrumental in shutting down drug cost reform bill

By JOEY CAPPELLETTI  
Of the Keizertimes

Keizer's congressional representative Kurt Schrader cast a pivotal vote last week to shut down a bill that would have allowed the government to negotiate costs of prescription drugs with pharmaceutical companies.

Schrader's critics claim large donations from pharmaceutical companies influenced his vote. Schrader, who represents the 5th Congressional District in Oregon, refuted this claim during an interview with the *Keizertimes* and said the bill never had a chance of passing the Senate anyways.

The bill, known as HR 3 or the "Elijah E. Cummings Lower Drug Costs Now Act," would have allowed the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services to directly negotiate the costs of at least 50 of the 125 drugs that account for the greatest Medicare spending. The negotiated prices would have been offered under Medicare

in addition to most private health insurances.

The vote, which occurred in the House Energy and Commerce Committee on Sept. 15, ended in a 29-29 deadlock after Schrader joined Republicans and two other moderate Democrats. The tie meant the bill would not move forward to the House floor.

HR 3 was just one part of the \$3.5 trillion reconciliation package Democrats are trying to pass.

The drug cost reform bill was seen as one way to fund the package after a 2019 analysis by the Congressional Budget Office estimated the bill would lower Medicare spending by \$456 billion.

Schrader's main issue with the bill is a pricing index that wouldn't allow the negotiated maximum price to exceed 120% of the average price in Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom. Schrader cited a Congressional Budget Office



Rep. Kurt Schrader visited the *Keizertimes* office last month.

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analysis that said while the bill would save money, it would also lead to fewer new medicines for patients.

"The fact that we were the country that came up with more of the (COVID-19) vaccines quicker, that is no accident. That's because of our ability to innovate, get things done in a quick manner," Schrader said.

When asked why 120% of what international pharmaceutical companies make still isn't enough for that innovation, Schrader said, "There's no 100% answer, you know, we're trying to figure this out as we go. We just have the budget office's remarks that innovation would be stifled if we did HR 3 like it is."

In place of the rejected bill, Schrader and Rep. Scott Peters (D-CA) introduced the Reduced Costs and Continued Cures Act on Sept. 14. The bill is a more moderate approach to drug cost reform and would set a \$1,200 annual out-of-pocket cap on drug costs for most seniors. The biggest difference, according to Schrader, is that his

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