

STAND WITH FAMILIES AFFECTED BY ASBESTOS, AND HELP KILL FACT ACT



My husband was the late U.S. Rep. Bruce F. Vento, who served for almost 24 years in the House of Representatives representing Minnesota's Fourth Congressional District. He died from mesothelioma in 2000 within eight and a half months of being diagnosed.

Mesothelioma is an aggressive cancer caused by asbestos exposure. Bruce was exposed while working his way through college as a laborer, years before he became involved in public life.

With his death, our country lost a hardworking and humble public servant years before his time. Bruce's parents, siblings, children, grandchildren and I lost so much more.



Since his death, I have worked with asbestos patients and family members from across the country to fight for a ban on asbestos and to protect the rights of people whose lives have been forever affected by this terrible poison.

I have recently been involved in the effort to stop the so-called "Furthering Asbestos Claims Transparency Act," or FACT Act, which would obstruct justice for victims dying from asbestos-related diseases while giving a handout to the very corporations that knowingly poisoned and killed them.

The FACT Act would require that the personal information of sick and dying asbestos patients and their families be posted on a public website, including names, addresses, medical diagnoses, financial compensation received and the last four digits of our Social Security numbers.

This is precisely the kind of information that law enforcement officials tell the public we should not share on the Internet because it leaves us vulnerable to identity thieves and con artists.

The House could be considering a vote on this bad legislation in the coming weeks, making it all the more urgent that we act now to protect the privacy of asbestos victims and their families.

Supporters of the FACT Act are the corporations that exposed innocent workers, consumers and their family members to asbestos, while concealing what they knew about this dangerous poison. They claim that this gross violation of our privacy is necessary in order to protect asbestos patients from fraud against the asbestos trust funds that were set up to compensate asbestos victims and their families. Yet, not a single instance of fraud against the trust funds has been identified.



What is worse, while the bill's supporters claim that they are doing it for asbestos victims, not one victim of asbestos exposure or an affected family member has been allowed to be heard on this legislation. The only people who would be directly affected by the bill have been completely shut out of the process.

The FACT Act would also bog down the asbestos trust funds in endless paperwork to respond to information requests from asbestos companies. This would drain the funds of money that is desperately needed to compensate sick and dying victims. As the victims get more and more desperate, they will be willing to settle cases for pennies on the dollar, taking needed compensation away from families and leaving it in the pockets of the responsible companies.

I recently traveled to Washington, D.C., and met with Sens. Al Franken and Amy Klobuchar and Rep. Betty McCollum, all of whom committed to work with asbestos patients and family members to stop the FACT Act from becoming law. I hope that we can count on the rest of Minnesota's congressional delegation to stand with asbestos patients and families and against the FACT Act.