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**Office of Congressman Larry Kissell**

Representing North Carolina’s 8th District

*WEEKLY COLUMN*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

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**This Week in Washington**

The best part of my job as your representative is that I am blessed with the opportunity to meet people and hear about their families, their work, and the stories about what is important in their lives. The most inspiring of those stories come from all types of folks—from soldiers to kindergarten teachers. My favorite ones remind me that no matter how divided Washington is, one person can still make a difference.

Back in 2009, I met a young Charlotte mother named Heather Ferguson, who was on a mission for her son, Dylan, who battles a condition known as primary lymphedema, which is a blockage of the lymphatic system that causes painful swelling. In her fight to give her child a better quality of life, she reached out to her state representative, Rep. Tricia Cotham, and they worked to pass a bipartisan bill in the North Carolina House to require insurers to help cover the cost of compression garments and devices that help treat lymphedema. More than 5 million Americans suffer from lymphedema, and these textile-based products—some made right here in our district—help to prevent the swelling and complications that surround this terrible condition. When Heather came to me with her story—the story of Dylan’s struggle at such a young age with an otherwise manageable disease—I knew we had to do something at the national level.

I introduced the Lymphedema Diagnosis and Treatment Cost-Saving Act of 2010 and unfortunately it didn't get voted on last Congress, but we have reintroduced it in this Congress and hope that Speaker Boehner will bring it to the floor for a vote. This legislation would require Medicare to cover the compression garments and devices that are vital to treating lymphedema and preventing so many of its complications. By requiring Medicare to cover this, it would set a precedent for health insurance companies across the country to also cover these items. They, along with Medicare, will help treat folks that are suffering before it’s too late and save health care dollars at the same time. It makes absolutely no sense to me why Medicare and many health insurers will cover the catastrophic care of the complications of lymphedema, but won’t cover a cheap way to manage the disease and protect quality of life and lower costs along the way.

This week, lymphedema advocates from across the country came to Washington to speak with their representatives about our bill and the common sense way that it helps so many. I was proud to host a Capitol Hill briefing so that Heather and folks just like her from all over America could tell their story and explain just how important this legislation is to them and their families. Groups like the American Cancer Society, Lance Armstrong’s LIVESTRONG and Susan G. Komen for the Cure have endorsed this bill because of how much it will do to help cancer survivors, who make up the largest block of lymphedema sufferers. What started as one mother’s fight for her son has become a movement to help millions.

This is a simple lesson in the power of what one person can do in our great country. This is what democracy is all about, ordinary citizens standing up for what they believe is right. At a time when it seems that nobody in Washington can agree on much of anything, this is a good lesson to remember. I believe we could use some legislation inspired by real people fighting for a cause they believe in, not more of the partisan wrangling and blame games. Just imagine, if Congress passed our lymphedema bill today, we’d immediately help millions of Americans avoid complications from a condition that is otherwise manageable if given the right resources.

I’m truly blessed and honored to represent you in Congress, and I’ll do everything I can to make sure your voice is heard. As always, please call on our office if we can be of assistance to you or your family.

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