

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

### **Delegate applauds input for changing her mind**

West Virginia is the state with the highest death rate from cervical cancer in our country. The devastation of cervical cancer can be cured if detected early. However, we needlessly lose between 40 and 50 West Virginia mothers, daughters, nieces, neighbors and coworkers every year. If women get this disease, which may have no symptoms, they can die a horrible death. As one doctor described it for me, if cervical cancer is not caught in time, women's internal organs rot inside them.

I have worked for many years to assure that all women, regardless of income level and or lack of insurance, have access to yearly Pap smears and to treatment for cervical cancer. The high death rate has persisted nevertheless.

It was exciting news when researchers, including teams of WVU scientists, determined that this particular cancer was caused by a virus, the human papilloma virus. There are nearly 100 types of HPV, some of which are cancer-causing, some of which are transmitted by sexual contact and others which cause warts on hands and feet.

Even more promising was the discovery of a vaccine that could prevent some of the cancer-causing varieties of this virus. This is the first vaccine that has ever been shown to prevent cancer. It gives great hope that other vaccines to protect us from cancer will be developed.

It was to prevent these horrible deaths in our state that I agreed to co-sponsor a bill that would require vaccinations for this dread disease. At the time, I was not aware that the manufacturer of the vaccine had drafted the legislation and was spending money to promote it. That fact both disturbs and offends me, since the subject matter is so important and passage could have resulted in a large outlay of public funds. In addition, several parents wrote to me and to this newspaper with legitimate reservations about the bill I had not considered. A physician wrote and warned we should be cautious until we are more certain about any possible side effects. Given all of the problems with the bill, I asked the chair of the House Health Committee not to place it on the agenda.

Because of citizen input, this bill will not pass.

The vaccine still has great promise for preventing a deadly disease, but there needs to be more time and study devoted to determining the risks, whether to assist with funding and when it should be administered to young people and adults. Our legislative process is intentionally designed to be slow and deliberative in order to benefit from citizen input. What happened with this bill is an example of the way the process is supposed to work. I thank all of those who contacted me on both sides of this issue. Furthermore, I encourage everyone to continue to contact your legislators as the session continues. The last day of this year's regular session is March 10.

**Delegate Barbara Evans Fleischauer**  
**D-Monongalia Morgantown**