

Pain Sufferers [in Billings] Rally for [Montana Senator Max] Baucus' Support

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See also: "[DEA Accused of Targeting Pain Doctors](#)"; Cochran; Billings Gazette; 2005-06-16

More than 30 people crowded outside of Max Baucus' downtown office Friday afternoon in hopes of giving the senator faces to place with the names on the dozens of letters his office has received since April from chronic-pain patients.

"These are people," said Greg Wilkinson, a pain sufferer. "They are Montana citizens. They are being denied medical care."

Wilkinson has pain from a spine injury three years ago that affects his body. He is one of about 75 patients who have been unable to get medication since DEA agents raided Dr. Richard A. Nelson's West End office and told him to stop treating the chronic-pain patients two months ago.

The group met on the lawn outside of the Granite Tower, where Sen. Max Baucus, D-Mont., and Sen. Conrad Burns, R-Mont., have office space. The patients say the DEA is wrong to stop their treatments. They have sent letters to both senators, other state officials and federal officials, but have had no response.

Siobhan Reynolds, the president of the Pain Relief Network, traveled to Billings from New York this week to meet with Nelson and his patients. Reynolds said Baucus' office declined an invitation to meet with the patients Thursday, so she made an appointment with his office at 1:30 p.m. Friday and invited the patients.

Roberts said she wants the senators to realize the patients are their constituents.

"We want to humanize the people," she said. "We want the senators to realize these are people just like them. This could happen to anybody."

Baucus was not there. Communications Director Barrett Kaiser came out and heard the patients' concerns. The crowd also gave Kaiser a petition signed by 34 people asking Baucus to initiate a Senate Judiciary Committee investigation of the actions taken by the DEA and its interference with the medical needs of Montana residents.

"I promise to take each concern to Max," Kaiser said.

But it is hard to say what will be done, Kaiser said. Baucus believes in the justice system and has a strict policy not to interfere with criminal investigations or legal policies, he said.

The patients said they feel Friday's meeting was the first step to being recognized by Baucus and the other state officials but that there are still questions to be answered.

Ron Carter, who can't work because of pain in his back and neck from a botched disc surgery, wondered whether the senators knew anything about them.

"I want to see if the senators have any idea what's going on," Carter said.

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