

## House Panel Will Examine Lack of Funds for Drug Program

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*By Anna Edney*

A program created two years ago to financially assist states that set up controlled substance monitoring programs has not gotten off the ground and the House Energy and Commerce Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee will probe why next week.

The program is meant to help combat prescription drug abuse of potent medications like the highly addictive OxyContin, but the administration never requested funding for HHS' National All Substances Prescription Electronic Reporting program.

"We believe that such systems are very successful, but do note that the Department of Justice has been funding such systems through [the] Harold Rogers [program]," said Joe Faha, director of legislation for HHS' Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration.

Congress created the Justice Department's Harold Rogers Prescription Drug Monitoring Program in 2001, named after its champion, Rep. **Harold Rogers**, R-Ky. While the Harold Rogers program allows states to establish their own regulations, the newer SAMHSA program requires states to collect information on certain controlled substances and have the capability to share information with other states to receive grant money.

SAMHSA "would be happy to run the program" if it received funding, but OMB has resisted including money for a program it views as duplicative, Faha said. The Harold Rogers FY07 budget was \$7.5 million, while Congress authorized \$10 million, which went unappropriated, for the SAMHSA program.

Former Sen. **Tim Hutchinson**, R-Ark., who now counsels the American Society of Interventional Pain Physicians, said supporters hope the planned Oct. 24 hearing of the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee will draw attention to the program and possibly even get it funding for this fiscal year.

"We're certainly mystified that it has not been in the president's budget even though the president signed it into law," Hutchinson said.

Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee ranking member **Ed Whitfield**, R-Ky., proposed the bill that created the SAMHSA program, which was co-sponsored soon after by Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee Chairman **Bart Stupak**, D-Mich.

A witness list for the hearing has not been released, but SAMHSA's Center for Substance Abuse Treatment Director Wesley Clark is slated to testify.

SAMHSA officials have provided technical assistance to Whitfield on the lawmaker's concern about the lack of funding, but they have not asked staff for money, Faha said.