

# Congressman Christopher H. Smith Guest Blog

May Awareness LDA Guest Blogger



**Congressman Christopher H. Smith (NJ-04)**, elected in 1980, is currently in his 20th term in the U.S. House of Representatives, serving New Jersey's Fourth Congressional District.

Since the early 1990s, Smith has authored comprehensive amendments and legislation to increase federal funding for Lyme research and enhanced treatment access for Lyme patients. Smith co-founded and currently co-chairs the bipartisan Lyme Disease Caucus, which serves as an incubator for Lyme disease legislation and promotes Lyme disease awareness in the House of Representatives.

Smith's legislation (H.R. 611; H.R. 2557; H.R. 1179; H.R. 741; H.R. 3427) to create a Tick-Borne Diseases Advisory Committee served as the prototype and was ultimately incorporated as Section 2062 in the **21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act (P.L. 114-255)**. Section 2062 established the first federal

Interagency Lyme and Tick-Borne Disease Working Group dedicated to facilitate research, development, and collaboration on Lyme disease. In November 2018, the Working Group released its first report to Congress, stating: “[i]ncreased Federal funding, prioritization, and leadership are needed to reverse the alarming trends associated with tick-borne diseases.” Smith is already working on legislation to help the federal government pursue this mandate.

## **A Message from Congressman Chris Smith**

Dear Friends:

As the co-chair of the bipartisan House Lyme Disease Caucus, I am deeply grateful and inspired by the Lyme Disease Association, other NGOs, family caregivers, Lyme literate docs, and—above all—the patients who continue to press our government to invest more in research for a cure, the prevention and best treatment options for those with Lyme.

Each day, the Caucus works to advance initiatives to help the overwhelming number of patients currently suffering from Lyme disease; the more than 300,000 Americans who will be diagnosed with Lyme just this year alone; and the hundreds of thousands who are unknowingly suffering from Lyme due to misdiagnosis or lack of clear symptoms.

The most prevalent vector-borne disease in the U.S. today, Lyme can lead to disseminated infection and can affect every system in the body, including the central nervous system. Later symptoms of Lyme include neurological problems such as facial paralysis, memory loss and heart symptoms such as heart block and inflammation of the heart muscle. Lyme has been reported in every state in the U.S. My state of New Jersey has a particularly high incidence of Lyme, yet, unfortunately incidences of Lyme are rapidly increasing across the nation.

We have made some important strides combatting Lyme disease in Congress—funding research through the Department of Defense and the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. But Lyme is now an epidemic and much more must be done to help those exposed to and suffering from Lyme.

The federal Tick-Borne Disease Working Group—created by provisions I wrote and helped secure in the *21<sup>st</sup> Century Cures Act (P.L. 114-255)*—released its inaugural report to Congress late last year. The federal Working Group admitted that “increased Federal funding, prioritization, and leadership are needed to reverse the alarming trends associated with tick-borne diseases.” They added: “Federal funding for tick-borne diseases is less per new surveillance case than that of other diseases.”

We need greater funding and resources to address the many remaining roadblocks to proper Lyme disease diagnosis and treatment. As the author of new legislation, H.R. 220, the *National Tick-Borne Diseases Control and Accountability Act*, I am working hard to boost scientifically-based answers to provide solutions, and to bring greater federal support to the patients living with this debilitating disease.

I am also looking into highly disturbing claims—shocking—and data revealed in a new book released just last week, *“Bitten: The Secret History of Lyme Disease and Biological Weapons.”* Authored by Kris Newby, a Lyme Disease survivor and producer of the compelling Lyme Disease documentary *“Under our Skin,”* the new book, documents serious allegations about possible complicity by U.S. government officials—as far back as the 1950s and 60s—in the development of Lyme Disease.

I’ve read the book—couldn’t put it down. The persuasive and frightening information detailed in the book requires a serious and comprehensive investigation to get to the truth and determine if there is any legal culpability in the spread of Lyme Disease. I have raised this issue with the President

and Cabinet members of several government agencies, and have, along with Collin Peterson the democrat co-chair of the Caucus—requested an Inspector General investigation through the Departments of Defense, Agriculture and Homeland Security.

We owe it to the overwhelming number of individuals suffering from Lyme Disease to go wherever the facts lead. Transparency is key. We must establish the truth of the origins of Lyme disease and be fully prepared to treat, cure and prevent this insidious disease in the future.

*Chris Smith.*

*Chris Smith is a Republican congressman serving New Jersey's Fourth Congressional District. Smith, who has written more laws than all but one of the current 435 members of Congress, is the cofounding, cochairman of the Lyme Disease Caucus in the House of Representatives and has successfully pushed for increased federal funding of Lyme research.*