

Congress Is Forming a Bipartisan Alternative Medicine Caucus



By Alex Berezow, PhD — December 28, 2017



Credit: Wellcome Images/Wikipedia [1]

Open displays of bipartisanship are rare these days and, as such, should be applauded. Unfortunately, a recent example of bipartisanship promotes junk science and bogus health claims.

In a [press release](#) [2], Democratic Congressman Jared Polis and Republican Congressman Mike Coffman announced their intention to launch the Integrative Health and Wellness Caucus. That sounds nice, until you realize that "integrative" and "wellness" are code words for "alternative medicine."

However, as we've said multiple times, there's no such thing as alternative medicine. If alternative medicine worked, it would just be called medicine. In other words, a patient has two choices: evidence-based medicine or witchcraft. Congress has decided that it would like to throw more support behind the latter.

The press release says that integrative health treatments have been successful. That's wrong. Consider the following:



Echinacea for colds. Ginkgo biloba for memory. Glucosamine and chondroitin for arthritis. Black cohosh for menopausal hot flashes. Saw palmetto for prostate problems. Shark cartilage for cancer. All proved no better than dummy pills in big studies funded by the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine. The lone exception: ginger capsules may help chemotherapy nausea.

The [Associated Press](#) [3] wrote that in 2009. Since then, the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM) has changed its name to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH). It has spent [roughly \\$3 billion](#) [4] since its inception, the vast majority of which was wasted investigating nonsense like "magnet therapy."

Where did this pseudoscientific monstrosity come from? Former [Democratic Senator Tom Harkin is mostly at fault](#) [5], but there is plenty of blame to go around. Current Republican Senator Orrin Hatch also likes alternative medicine, specifically the [supplements industry](#) [6]. Dietary supplements are [poorly regulated](#) [7], [often worthless](#) [8], and [sometimes dangerous](#) [9].

The influence of alternative medicine is widespread and pernicious. A study reported by [RealClearScience](#) [10] compared the outcomes of cancer patients on conventional therapy with those using alternative medicine. It found that, after five years, 78% of the former were still alive, compared to only 55% of the latter. Alternative medicine kills people. Literally.

Reps. Polis and Coffman should be ashamed of themselves. Instead of applause, they deserve reprobation. If they truly wanted to advance healthcare in America, they would demand that all forms of alternative medicine submit to the rigorous testing standards of the FDA. Then, most of it would disappear.

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Links

[1]

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Alternative_medicine#/media/File:A_person_discovering_that_they_have_been_transformed

[2] <https://coffman.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=2384>

[3] http://www.nbcnews.com/id/31190909/ns/health-alternative_medicine/t/billion-spent-no-alternative-cures-found/#.WkUrvIQ-cWo

[4] https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/National_Center_for_Complementary_and_Integrative_Health

[5]

https://www.realclearscience.com/articles/2013/01/31/science_says_good_riddance_sen_tom_harkin_106451.html

[6] <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/06/21/us/politics/21hatch.html>

[7] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/03/30/danger-loosely-regulated-supplements-11070>

[8] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/04/05/five-reasons-not-take-dietary-supplements-11089>

[9] <https://www.acsh.org/news/2017/03/21/i-was-wrong-about-kratom-and-heres-why-11022>

[10]

