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**Boozman**

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**Halloween Shines Light on the Dangers of Cosmetic Contact Lenses**

Rep. Boozman's Column for the Week of October 31, 2005

Washington, Oct 31 -

Every October, the search for the perfect Halloween costume begins. In recent years, once fashion accessory has become a popular compliment to Halloween costumes. That accessory is a pair of cosmetic contact lenses, which will change the color or appearance of a person's eyes but contain no corrective power. The sales of these lenses tend to spike around Halloween. Unfortunately, the number of eye injuries also increase.

Let's say someone was looking for one final touch for their costume, perhaps wanted to change their eyes to give them the appearance of cat eyes. One quick search online would turn up merchants who sell cosmetic contact lens that would change the appearance of a person's eyes to match their outfit. They can be purchased for around thirty bucks and would be a perfect addition to a costume. Once purchased though, they arrive with no instructions on how to use them or care for them. Without this information, there is a good chance that this person will end up with some serious problems ranging from a simple eye infection to loss of vision.

As an optometrist, I certainly understand the damage that is done when people do not follow directions on how to properly care for their contacts. A simple eye infection is the least of the problems unsupervised contact lens use can cause. At worst, improper usage can result in permanent loss of vision.

It seems only right then, that we make sure instructions are given when these lenses are sold. Right now, that is not happening. Last week, we took up a bill in the U.S. House of Representative that would fix this problem by requiring the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate non-corrective colored contact lenses as medical devices.

Back in April of 2003, the FDA changed the classification of noncorrective color contact lenses from medical devices to cosmetic devices, which literally meant they were regulated the same as lipstick. The bill we passed in the House last week, S. 172, originated in Senate and had already passed that body. It requires the FDA to regulate these lenses the same way as corrective contact lenses by classifying them as medical devices. I had introduced similar legislation in the House and am pleased that the Senate bill will be going to the president to be signed into law.

Without this law, people would still be able to buy these lenses at locales ranging from nail salons to gas stations. Because they are so readily available, teenagers and young adults can often purchase them without parental supervision. Many of these merchants do not know how to use or care for the devices themselves, much less pass this information on to consumers. Simple things informing a person not to share the lenses, not to sleep with them in and that the lenses need to be cleaned are not being told to consumers before the lenses are sold. This dangerous practice needs to be stopped and this new law will ensure that it is.

With another Halloween come and gone, it is important that we bring attention to the fact that colored contact lenses are being sold without any instruction on how to safely use them. The legislation we passed today is a simple fix to a very dangerous problem. The FDA, medical professionals, industry officials and patient advocacy groups all supported this measure because it is the easiest and safest way to protect consumers. By this time next year, we should see a reduction in the number of eye injuries caused by these lenses as consumers will now be armed with all the information on how to properly use and care for them.