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Allen co-sponsors bill to study drug costs and effectiveness

● The studies would try to cut spending by providing information outside of direct-to-consumer ads.

By **JOSIE HUANG**
Staff Writer

As Congress debates a Medicare prescription drug plan, bipartisan support is growing for a bill that would mandate studies comparing the costs and effectiveness of different medications.

The bill, co-sponsored by U.S. Rep. Tom Allen, D-Maine, is built on the belief that sharing information with state Medicaid officials, doctors and patients will lead to better spending habits and bring down prescription drug costs.

"We've been overwhelmed by (direct-to-consumer) ads, the

purpose of which is to sell drugs and not provide balanced information," Allen said. "This is an antidote to pharmaceutical TV ads."

U.S. Rep. Jo Ann Emerson, R-Missouri, is co-sponsoring the bill, which is also co-sponsored by five other Democrats and five other Republicans.

The bill is winning support from groups such as the American Association of Retired Persons and Families USA, but is drawing criticism from the pharmaceutical industry's leading trade group. Pharmaceutical Research and Manufacturers of America has begun to circulate a memo around Washington, D.C., listing what it calls the bill's faults.

"The concern is that in all likelihood, the bill would lead to government making decisions about which patients should get medicines and coming up with a single determination on the comparative value of different medicines," said Randy

Burkholder, a PhRMA policy analyst.

Emerson says she doesn't understand the complaints.

"We have to do something about the pricing situation because Medicare is going to go broke if we do not get serious about bringing down costs in the marketplace," Emerson said.

The bill would authorize \$50 million for the National Institutes of Health and \$25 million for the Agency for Healthcare Research and Quality to conduct the studies. The information would be reported to Congress and made available over the Internet.

Such studies have been implemented in Oregon and Michigan and countries such as New Zealand and Australia, Allen said. Allen said he hopes the bill is considered this year, and he is continuing to find co-sponsors. Sen. Jeff Bingaman, D-New Mexico, will soon introduce a version of the bill in the Senate.