

H.R. 4348, to reauthorize the Kay Hagan Tick Act

Excerpts of remarks by Rep Chris Smith (R-NJ) in the House of Representatives during debate on H.R. 4348

July 20, 2026

At a May 29th press conference in New Hampshire, HHS Secretary Robert F. Kennedy, Jr.—who has been a tremendous leader in the war on Lyme Disease—announced a [“sweeping new plan to combat Lyme Disease and advance treatment”](#)

Secretary Kennedy said: “Millions of Americans battling Lyme disease and other tick-borne illnesses have spent years searching for answers, treatment, and support. Today, the Trump Administration is launching one of the most ambitious federal efforts ever to combat Lyme disease by accelerating research, expanding innovation, and improving care for patients and families. We are going after this disease at its source, driving faster diagnostics and new prevention strategies, and delivering the urgency and action Americans deserve...The initiative” he also said, “will develop and deploy practical strategies to target and eliminate ticks on wildlife before they can spread disease to humans....

“Lyme disease” he said, “remains one of the nation’s fastest-growing vector-borne health threats. More than 476,000

Americans are diagnosed with Lyme disease each year, and recent data show emergency room visits for tick bites reached their highest springtime level in nearly a decade.”

Secretary Kennedy also announced new actions to combat Alpha-gal syndrome, a tick-associated condition that can trigger potentially serious allergic reactions to red meat and other mammalian products. CDC estimates, nearly 500,000 Americans are living with Alpha-gal syndrome, though emerging evidence suggests the true number may be significantly higher.

Mr. Speaker, as my colleagues know, ticks not only transmit Lyme disease but other deadly or debilitating illnesses such as Alpha-gal, babesiosis, Powassan virus, Rocky Mountain spotted fever, and anaplasmosis. Vector borne diseases are now endemic in regions of the country where they have not historically been present.

Disease laden ticks are now found in all 48 contiguous U.S. states.

The problem is exploding—not abating.

It is therefore critical that Congress take immediate action to support and sustain ongoing comprehensive efforts to combat these insidious diseases that kill and disable.

I urge my colleagues support [H.R. 4348](#), a five-year reauthorization of the Kay Hagan Tick Act, a law that expires on September 30th.

My colleagues will recall that our distinguished colleague North Carolina Senator Kay Hagen suffered a tick bite and died in 2019 from encephalitis caused by Powassan virus—the current law and reauthorization is named in her honor.

The [original Kay Hagan Tick Act](#), an effort I led in 2019 in the House and Susan Collins in the Senate became law as part of the [FY 2020 Further Consolidated Appropriations Act](#). The Act created among other things, a whole-of-government [national strategy](#) to combat Lyme and other tick-borne diseases with a special focus on surveillance, diagnosis, treatment, education and prevention.

(I've been working on Lyme Disease since 1992. I introduced my first bill of several—the [Lyme Disease Initiative Act of 1998](#)—almost 30 years ago.)

In February, 2024, HHS released the National Public Health Strategy to Prevent and Control Vector-borne Diseases in People with mutually reinforcing goals to:

- Better understand when, where, and how people are exposed to and get sick or die from VBDs.
- Develop, evaluate, and improve tools, methods, and guidance to diagnose VBDs and their pathogens.

- Develop, evaluate, and improve tools, methods, and guidance to prevent and control VBDs.
- Develop and assess drugs and treatment strategies for VBDs.
- Disseminate and implement public health tools, programs, and collaborations to prevent, detect, diagnose, and respond to VBD threats.

H.R. 4348, supports this whole of government assault on Lyme and other vector borne diseases.

H.R. 4348 again authorizes \$50 million over five years for the regional centers of excellence, which coordinate with academia and local public health agencies to conduct research on Lyme in their areas and train public health professionals to identify and treat Lyme.

Finally, H.R.434—again as we did in the original law—authorizes cooperative agreement funding for states and localities—\$100 million over five years—to tangibly assist state public health departments and other local entities to support the development and implementation of evidence-based research, interventions, and treatment with respect to—

- educating and informing the public, based on evidence-based public health research and data, about Lyme Disease and other vector-borne diseases;
- supporting early detection and diagnosis;

- supporting prevention;
- improving treatment;
- supporting care planning and management for individuals with Lyme disease and other tick- and vector-borne diseases; and

I thank the Chairman Brett Guthrie for his personal and extraordinarily strong support of H.R. 4348, as well as his Staff Director Megan Jackson and Health Subcommittee staff Jay Gulshen and Emma Schultheis.

Special thanks to Ranking Member Frank Pallone, Health Subcommittee Chair Morgan Griffith and Ranking Member Diana DeGette as well as original cosponsors Lloyd Doggett, Paul Tonko, and Tom Kean.