

Last week, a federal government task force created a national stir with the release of its recommendations that women between the ages of 40 and 49 should skip their annual breast cancer screenings. The panel's opinion turned years of medical advice on its head – generating both skepticism about the new findings' accuracy and cynicism over its motivation.

Breast cancer is the second leading cause of cancer deaths among women in America, and much of the breast cancer prevention efforts, so far, have centered on early detection. As with most cancers, breast cancer survival rates are strongly affected by the timing of treatment. Not surprisingly, many doctors, and even breast cancer survivors, are puzzled by any advice to scrap years of preventative exams.

The U.S. Preventative Services Task Force based its controversial conclusion on the lower breast cancer detection rates in women age 40 to 49 as compared to those age 50 and older. In general, 1,900 screenings of women age 40 to 49 will turn up a single detection, while on average, it takes 1,339 screenings before a detection is made among women 50 and over.

The task force reasoned that more women were subjected to false positives and unnecessary follow-up treatments than if such screenings were dropped altogether.

These recommendations have prompted a good deal of criticism from cancer doctors and former cancer patients who note that longstanding campaigns to increase breast cancer awareness and promote early screenings have a lot to do with the continued decline in breast cancer death rates. Surely any departure from these positive efforts would be counterproductive.

Many others questioned the motives of the government task force, wondering if its decision to discourage earlier age screenings might have more to do with saving money than saving lives?

For certain, the timing of the announcement, during the middle of the national debate over government-run health care, has fueled speculation that it's an early sign of health care rationing. Ironically, some of the most vocal Congressional disagreement with the new recommendations has come from members of both political parties, including some who support government health care.

I voted against the speaker's health care bill that passed the House on November 7, and I will continue to oppose any attempt to impose a government health care system or limit personal health care quality and choice.

With regard to breast cancer screenings, Americans are best served in following the expert advice of their doctors. Regular consultations and medical check-ups are the most effective ways to stay healthy. I believe government bureaucrats are less likely to know your personal health than your own doctor.

Taking Time for Thanksgiving:

Too often, the seemingly never ending political rancor in Washington tends to color the mood of

our nation, distracting our attention from the positive impact each of us can make on the lives of our neighbors. Thanksgiving helps to restore focus on our families and calls us to share our blessings with others.

America is in the midst of difficult times. Many are out of work and have lost their homes. The challenges of restoring our beleaguered economy are significant. After so much, it would be easy to see only the long road ahead rather than the progress we've made as a nation to rebuild. But that's not our tradition.

In these trying circumstances, we might do well to remember that America is a nation founded upon the collective desire to conquer great challenges. We are a people who can accomplish anything and who have never stopped dreaming – not even when confronted by a dictatorial foreign king, a long bloody civil war, two world wars and a great depression.

Our greatest strength is perhaps our freedom. Our liberty has not only inspired us to overcome, but also spurred us to advance mankind's technical reach to an unprecedented level in human history.

We can accomplish much because we are free and, accordingly, we owe so much to those who make that freedom possible. The men and women of our armed forces are showing great courage in the ongoing war against terrorism. No matter where they are in the world this Thanksgiving – from the front lines in Afghanistan and Iraq, to guarding our borders – our sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, husbands and wives, and mothers and fathers in uniform are not forgotten. The American people are solidly behind them and continue to offer prayers for their well-being and safe return home.

Wherever you plan to spend this Thanksgiving, please take time to reflect on all that we have as a nation that is good. There is still plenty for which to be thankful.

My staff and I work for you. If we can ever be of service, do not hesitate to call my office toll free at 1-800-288-8721.