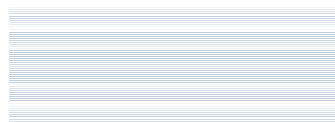


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NewsWire

**January 30, 2006**

**VGM punches back at Rep. Bill Thomas**

BAKERSFIELD, Calif. - In a controversial move that some industry watchers say did more harm than good, the VGM Group orchestrated a rally Jan. 24 outside the office of Rep. Bill Thomas, R-Calif., the man long-considered the industry's arch nemesis.

Between 3 p.m. and 6 p.m. Jan. 24, nearly 50 picketers paraded outside Thomas' office here, carrying signs that read: No two-tiered healthcare; No oxygen cuts; Support America's seniors; and Please Listen.

"(VGM CEO Van Miller) equated Bill Thomas to the bully syndrome," said John Gallagher, VGM's vice president of government relations. "If the bully keeps thinking he can knock you down, he'll keep knocking you down. If you hit him back, he'll go somewhere else, and that is what we are doing."

Thomas has been a leading architect behind many Medicare cuts to DME reimbursement. Most recently, in December he inserted language into a pending deficit reduction bill that caps oxygen reimbursement at 36 months and transfers title of the equipment to the beneficiary at that time. VGM and many other industry leaders say the cap would endanger beneficiaries who have no expertise in maintaining the equipment.

Last Chance for Patients Choice, a VGM initiated non-profit group that lobbies for industry interests, organized the rally. It also ran a commercial in the Bakersfield area that urged viewers to call Thomas and ask him to explain the Medicare cuts he advocates.

Local network affiliates covered the picket, and Gallagher appeared on a local conservative talk show to discuss it.

"Some who know D.C. will say this isn't going to get you anywhere, being confrontational and getting congressmen mad at you," said Jim Walsh, the president of VGM Management, Ltd., and general counsel to The VGM Group. "I might say, 'They might be right, but the nice way isn't working. We can't keep waiting.'"

Walsh is right that some within the industry disapprove of VGM's tactics.

"I question this strategy," said one industry watcher. "Bill Thomas hasn't done anything for the industry, but he could do a lot more to hurt us. I'm concerned. Now he'll be more focused on the industry."

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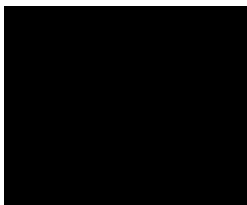


**HME Newswire**

**January 30, 2006**

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Another industry source agreed.

"If Thomas was going to lay off, you can forget it now," the source said.

Others applauded VGM. Industry efforts to educate Thomas and others--to convince them to stop cutting reimbursement and embrace the rhetoric that HME is cost effective and patient preferred--have fallen on deaf years, they say.

"To me, it's obvious that Thomas has declared war on the HME industry, and it is not going to do us any good to be a nice guy," said another industry watcher. "That is hard for me to say because my approach is always to do a win-win. I'd love to see the industry fund an opponent to run against him."

VGM called the Bakersfield demonstration the "first national effort to raise awareness by Last Chance for Patient Choice, but it will not be the last.

Other rallies and media campaigns are planned throughout the country."

"If we start getting the ears of people who before only though that we're a punching bag, I think the beneficiary wins and the industry wins," Gallagher said.

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