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Painting the Capitol Pink: The Breast Cancer Research Stamp and the Dangers of Congressional Cause Marketing

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# **PAINTING THE CAPITOL PINK: The Breast Cancer Research Stamp and the Danger of Congressional Cause Marketing**

Julia Markham Cameron

## ABSTRACT

Breast cancer awareness campaigns—widespread, largescale efforts focusing on general “awareness” of breast cancer, rather than the dissemination of information on detection and treatment—are common sights in the American public and private spheres. From NFL players donning pink socks to crafters selling “I love boobies!” t-shirts online, breast cancer-branded events and products have become an essential marketing tool to reach women, signaling corporate virtue in a palatable, nonaggressive manner. Even the federal government is party to the trend: in 1998, the U.S. Congress authorized the sale of the Breast Cancer Research Stamp (BCRS) by the U.S. Postal Service to raise awareness and research funds for breast cancer. The BCRS has been available ever since.

This Article posits that the BCRS is more an attempt by the federal government to capitalize on the goodwill and consumer engagement generated by breast cancer awareness marketing in the private sector, and less a good-faith attempt to treat, cure, or prevent breast cancer among Americans. The Article addresses three questions: (1) how does the BCRS reflect a private sector trend of embracing breast cancer cause marketing?; (2) why does Congress continually reauthorize the BCRS, even as other semipostal stamps lapse?; and (3) why has Congress chosen to raise money for breast cancer research through the BCRS? In answering these questions, I argue that the true legislative motivations behind the BCRS are to generate goodwill amongst voters, promote small-government values, and align with breast cancer awareness causes without compromising other political positions. I conclude that the BCRS exemplifies how Congress has eschewed expert opinion and instead adopted private sector marketing strategies when passing legislation.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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## INTRODUCTION

A search of “breast cancer awareness” on the social media site Pinterest returns thousands of results. Wine glasses with the message “Cancer messed with the wrong diva!”<sup>1</sup> appear next to

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1. *Breast Cancer Awareness*, PINTEREST, [https://www.pinterest.com/pin/AZAQjkVZxhs7KITo5PrXp\\_peUUazGkmSvLIdN9S9Y3YbprZ1hLb-VPg/visual-search/?x=8&y=8&w=272&h=345](https://www.pinterest.com/pin/AZAQjkVZxhs7KITo5PrXp_peUUazGkmSvLIdN9S9Y3YbprZ1hLb-VPg/visual-search/?x=8&y=8&w=272&h=345) [https://perma.cc/7JQL-V77B].

infographics showing how to self-administer a breast exam.<sup>2</sup> “Mammo-graham cracker” s’mores (marshmallow breast complete with a pink frosting nipple)<sup>3</sup> are presented alongside checklists about what to bring to the hospital for a mastectomy operation.<sup>4</sup> And everywhere—on Bible quotes, chemo hats, memorial tattoos, and handmade jewelry—is the pink breast cancer awareness ribbon.

The American Cancer Society estimates that about one in eight women will develop breast cancer in her life.<sup>5</sup> The average American is thus likely to meet many people who have experienced breast cancer in some form or another.<sup>6</sup> But even though most Americans are aware of breast cancer, breast cancer awareness campaigns—focusing on general “awareness” of the disease, rather than the dissemination of information on detection and treatment—are still commonplace. The Susan G. Komen Foundation has partnered with companies across the private sector to raise awareness by offering pink-hued, beribboned products from eggs to socks to diamond rings. Marketing firms suggest throwing breast cancer awareness parties in the workplace.<sup>7</sup> The good people of Pinterest showcase a variety of crafts and products that raise awareness, mainly through the use of the color pink and images of breasts. Even the federal government is party to the trend: since 1998, the U.S. Postal Service has sold the Breast Cancer Research Stamp (BCRS) to raise awareness and research funds for breast cancer.<sup>8</sup>

This Article explores how the BCRS is a government attempt to become involved in a larger trend of breast cancer awareness

2. Fearless Vixen Fitness, *Breast Cancer Awareness*, PINTEREST, <https://pin.it/2t7zyr5iaynzl5> [<https://perma.cc/N3RF-7C9P>].

3. HolisticWisdom.com, *Breast Cancer Awareness*, PINTEREST, <https://pin.it/tzsyjj3rcfht4h> [<https://perma.cc/9JBZ-9F5N>].

4. Carolina Charm, *Breast Cancer Awareness*, PINTEREST, <https://pin.it/vpya5bhher7iep> [<https://perma.cc/8449-8DCW>].

5. The American Cancer Soc’y Med. and Editorial Team, *How Common Is Breast Cancer?*, AMERICAN CANCER SOCIETY (Sept. 18, 2009), <https://www.cancer.org/cancer/breast-cancer/about/how-common-is-breast-cancer.html> [<https://perma.cc/8Q2R-2UR5>].

6. While breast cancer most commonly affects women, it also affects men and people who do not identify as either gender. In this Article, I tend to use the words “women,” “woman,” and “her” to discuss breast cancer sufferers. I discuss women, rather than the more general “people,” because the rhetoric around breast cancer is deeply feminized and directed at women.

7. Alyssa Hirkaler, *Breast Cancer Awareness Party Ideas: 2017’s Top 50*, THE DSM GROUP (Sept. 22, 2017), <https://www.thedsmgroup.com/breast-cancer-awareness-month-ideas> [<https://perma.cc/6JLD-54TA>].

8. United States Postal Service, *Semipostal Stamp Program*, <https://about.usps.com/corporate-social-responsibility/semipostals.htm> [<https://perma.cc/UJL8-Q2FV>].

marketing. The Article addresses three questions: (1) how does the BCRS reflect a private sector trend of embracing breast cancer cause marketing?; (2) why does Congress continually reauthorize the BCRS, even as other semipostal<sup>9</sup> stamps lapse?; and (3) why has Congress chosen to raise money for breast cancer research through the BCRS?

Part I discusses the history of breast cancer awareness marketing. Specifically, I focus on how companies have used breast cancer awareness campaigns to boost customer goodwill and escape scrutiny while engaging in activities that may cause breast cancer. Part II discusses the BCRS's passage and compares it to similar stamps authorized by Congress. Finally, in Part III, I argue that the true legislative motivations behind the BCRS are to generate goodwill amongst voters, promote small-government values, and align with breast cancer awareness causes without compromising other political positions. I conclude that the BCRS exemplifies how Congress has eschewed expert opinion and instead adopted private sector marketing strategies when passing legislation.

## I. THE HISTORY OF BREAST CANCER AWARENESS MARKETING

In almost 100 years, breast cancer has gone from a silent killer to a pink-hued cultural phenomenon. In this Part, I discuss the evolution of both cause marketing and breast cancer advocacy in the hopes of determining how those trends converged to create a culture where the BCRS could enjoy sustained support. I begin with a discussion of cause marketing. Next, I turn to the history of breast cancer awareness advocacy in the United States and how it turned from a grassroots, women-led movement to a corporate marketing juggernaut. In the final two Subparts of Part I, I interrogate why breast cancer specifically became such a popular marketing hook, and then examine the criticisms of breast cancer cause marketing and how this marketing may detrimentally impact breast cancer prevention, treatment, and eradication.

### A. *What is Cause Marketing?*

Cause marketing is, first and foremost, marketing. In a cause marketing campaign, a for-profit business cooperates with a non-profit organization for mutual benefit by aligning the profit goals of the corporation with the social impact goals of the nonprofit.<sup>10</sup> A

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9. A semipostal stamp is a stamp issued by Congress rather than by the Post Office.

10. *Cause Marketing*, BREAST CANCER CONSORTIUM: CRITICAL THINKING ON

corporation has three primary objectives when engaging in a cause marketing campaign: (1) build a reputation as a good corporate citizen, (2) deepen employee loyalty, and (3) increase sales.<sup>11</sup>

While cause marketing can raise needed funds and awareness for important social challenges, it can also have a negligible—or even negative—effect on the cause a corporation purports to help. First, research suggests that consumers who buy something from a cause marketing campaign give *less* to charity than those who do not.<sup>12</sup> Second, customers have no way to confirm whether or not funds are actually donated because companies are often not required to report the balance sheets for their cause marketing programs.<sup>13</sup> Third, partnerships with nonprofits can also mask conflicts of interest: a cause marketing campaign to support cancer research can be a useful public relations tool for a company that manufactures products with carcinogenic ingredients.<sup>14</sup>

In the 1990s, breast cancer awareness grew to become a *cause célèbre* in corporate marketing. Across industries, corporations aligned themselves with breast cancer awareness nonprofits in order to engage in cause marketing campaigns. In the following Subpart, I discuss how breast cancer marketing evolved from grassroots, women-led movements to one of the corporate sector's favorite causes.

#### B. *The Rise of Breast Cancer Awareness Cause Marketing in the Private Sector*

The story of the breast cancer awareness movement is a story about how pleas for visibility from breast cancer survivors and their family members became coopted by corporations, who used

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BREAST CANCER, <http://breastcancerconsortium.net/resources/topics/cause-marketing> [<https://perma.cc/F4NZ-K2NU>].

11. *Id.*

12. Adradhna Krishna, *Can Supporting A Cause Decrease Donations And Happiness? The Cause Marketing Paradox*, 21 J. OF CONSUMER PSYCHOL. 338, 341 (2011).

13. *Five Potential Pitfalls of Cause Marketing*, BREAST CANCER CONSORTIUM: CRITICAL THINKING ON BREAST CANCER, <http://breastcancerconsortium.net/resources/topics/potential-pitfalls-cause-marketing-programs> [<https://perma.cc/7DXV-SESH>].

14. *Id.*; see also Jennifer A. Harvey & Michael A. Strahilevitz, *The Power of Pink: Cause-Related Marketing and the Impact on Breast Cancer*, 6 J. OF AMERICAN C. OF RADIOLOGY 26, 31 (2009) (“In October 2007, Fat Bastard Wines donated 25 cents from the sale of every bottle of wine to breast cancer research, up to a limit of \$75,000. Although the intake of small amounts of alcohol may have some health benefit regarding cardiovascular disease, the use of alcohol also increases the risk for developing breast cancer in a dose-dependent fashion, with an increase in risk of 9% for each 10 g consumed per day.”).

breast cancer awareness to instill brand loyalty in their female buyers. As far back as the 1930s, American women have organized to combat breast cancer.<sup>15</sup> In 1936, the American Society for the Control of Cancer, which later became the American Cancer Society, formed the Women's Field Army, a program in which thousands of women promoted early detection of breast cancer through leafletting, media campaigns, lectures, and exhibitions.<sup>16</sup> Their pleas went largely unheard. Despite these efforts, breast cancer was not widely or publicly discussed until Betty Ford, the First Lady of the United States, disclosed that she had been diagnosed with breast cancer in 1974. The media covered her diagnosis and treatment extensively, often delivering detailed discussions of potential causes of the disease, methods of detection, treatment, and even the psychological impact of losing a breast.<sup>17</sup>

Over the next two decades, new treatment regimens developed, support groups proliferated, and breast cancer screenings became more common. These changes produced new social spaces, networks, and sensibilities among breast cancer survivors and fledgling activists—not to mention organizations committed to breast cancer-related issues.<sup>18</sup> In 1986, the National Alliance of Breast Cancer Organizations (NABCO) was formed, and by 1994 NABCO contained over 350 member organizations.<sup>19</sup> Suddenly, there was a network of breast cancer advocates who could work together, share information, and organize. Breast cancer awareness was growing, and so was the group of people who cared strongly for the cause. Despite this increased awareness, in 1990, the breast cancer death rate peaked, at 33 deaths for every 100,000 women.<sup>20</sup> The need for public awareness—and outcry, and pressure on the government to fund research, treatment, and prevention—was literally a matter of life and death.

At the turn of the decade, Charlotte Haley, whose grandmother, mother, and sister all had breast cancer, launched a grassroots campaign advocating for more government spending for breast cancer research. She looped a strand of peach-colored ribbon and distributed the ribbons in sets of five along with a card that

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15. SAMANTHA KING, *PINK RIBBONS, INC.: BREAST CANCER AND THE POLITICS OF PHILANTHROPY* 111 (University of Minnesota Press 2006).

16. *Id.*

17. *Id.*

18. *Id.*

19. *Id.*

20. *Breast Cancer*, NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF HEALTH (Oct. 2010), [https://archives.nih.gov/asites/report/09-09-2019/report.nih.gov/nihfactsheets/Pdfs/BreastCancer\(NCI\).pdf](https://archives.nih.gov/asites/report/09-09-2019/report.nih.gov/nihfactsheets/Pdfs/BreastCancer(NCI).pdf) [<https://perma.cc/EZ27-T632>].

said: “The National Cancer Institute’s annual budget is \$1.8 billion. Only 5 percent goes to cancer prevention. Help us wake up our legislators and America by wearing this ribbon.”<sup>21</sup> After sending some of these ribbons to *Self Magazine*, the magazine asked her if they could use them in a national campaign with Estee Lauder. Haley refused. *Self* and Estee Lauder nonetheless began using ribbons for breast cancer awareness; but, in order to protect themselves from legal challenges, they used pink ribbons instead of peach.<sup>22</sup>

This pink ribbon, borne out of corporate coopting of one woman’s plea for funding into cancer prevention, has become the most ubiquitous symbol of corporate breast cancer awareness cause marketing. In 1991, pink ribbons were first handed out at the Komen Foundations’ Race for a Cure in New York City. By the end of the year, Charlotte Haley’s peach ribbons had largely been subsumed by a tide of pink ribbons, which, buoyed by private sector support, had become the ubiquitous symbol of breast cancer awareness.<sup>23</sup>

Today, though, the pink ribbon is most closely associated with one group in particular: Susan G. Komen For the Cure (Komen). Over the years, Komen has raised billions of dollars for breast cancer research and treatment while urging women to get mammograms—their preferred method of action in the fight against breast cancer.<sup>24</sup> Much of Komen’s money comes from corporate partnerships. Komen has partnered with Bank of America, Amazon, Ford, the Dallas Cowboys, and World Wrestling Entertainment (WWE).<sup>25</sup> It partnered with Yoplait in the “Save Lids to Save Lives” campaign, in which Yoplait donated 10 cents per branded yogurt sold to Komen. Sponsorships extended to pink New Balance sneakers, pink NASCAR vehicles, and even pink ribbon-stamped Egghand’s Best eggs.<sup>26</sup>

The ubiquity of corporate breast cancer awareness cause marketing is clear. What is less clear is why corporations supported breast cancer awareness, out of all possible social causes.

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21. KING, *supra* note 15, at 125.

22. *Id.*

23. *Id.* at 126.

24. Natasha Singer, *Welcome, Fans, to the Pinking of America*, N.Y. TIMES (Oct. 5, 2011), [https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/16/business/in-the-breast-cancer-fight-the-pinking-of-america.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=all](https://www.nytimes.com/2011/10/16/business/in-the-breast-cancer-fight-the-pinking-of-america.html?_r=1&pagewanted=all) [https://perma.cc/NYM6-EM5U].

25. *Our Corporate Partners*, SUSAN G. KOMEN FOR THE CURE, [https://ww5.komen.org/Partner\\_Landing](https://ww5.komen.org/Partner_Landing) [https://perma.cc/XXK4-CV4F].

26. Singer, *supra* note 24.



### 1. Why Breast Cancer?

By the mid-1990s, breast cancer activists had brought the disease into the national conversation, creating a network of support programs, discourse, research opportunities, and general awareness that was prime for corporate capitalization. Once breast cancer awareness was widely accepted as a good and moral cause, companies had a noncontroversial cause to market to a powerful purchasing group: women. In Komen's own words, a corporate partnership with them offers "an unprecedented opportunity for corporate partners to align with a nationally recognized brand that is grounded by a loyal and influential participant base."<sup>27</sup> A brochure from a Komen event notes that partnering with Komen allows brands to "[tap] into the #1 health concern for women of all ages."<sup>28</sup>

Today, American women control 51 percent of the private wealth in this country and account for roughly 80 percent of the country's purchases.<sup>29</sup> Women make 70 percent of all travel decisions, purchase 57 percent of all consumer electronics, influence 80 percent of all automobile sales, and write about 80 percent of all personal checks.<sup>30</sup> And this purchasing power is not limited to the household: a majority of all purchasing managers, agents, and human resources directors—those in charge of making key decisions for corporate financial services—are women.<sup>31</sup>

As the Komen brochure notes, breast cancer is a top health concern for women. It is not, however, the greatest threat to women's health. Women are ten times more likely to die from heart disease than from breast cancer.<sup>32</sup> Women are more likely to die from cancers of the respiratory (71,550 per year) and digestive systems (59,810 per year) than they are from breast cancer (40,170 per

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27. *29th Annual Susan G. Komen Race for the Cure, Washington, D.C.*, SUSAN G. KOMEN FOR THE CURE (Sept. 8, 2018), [http://komendcwalk.info-komen.org/site/DocServer/2018\\_DC\\_Race\\_Sponsorship\\_Brochure.pdf?docID=16712](http://komendcwalk.info-komen.org/site/DocServer/2018_DC_Race_Sponsorship_Brochure.pdf?docID=16712) [<https://perma.cc/ML5N-3PVS>].

28. *Sponsorship Opportunities*, SUSAN G. KOMEN FOR THE CURE (2015), <http://komenswohio.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/04/2016-Sponsor-Brochure.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/W7TC-2874>].

29. ANDREA LEARNED & LISA JOHNSON, DON'T THINK PINK: WHAT REALLY MAKES WOMEN BUY—AND HOW TO INCREASE YOUR SHARE OF THIS CRUCIAL MARKET 9 (AMACOM American Management Association 2004).

30. *Id.*

31. *Id.*

32. Gayle A. Sulik, *Breast Cancer, Concept Brand with Pink Ribbon Logo*, PSYCHOLOGY TODAY (Aug. 31, 2013), <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/pink-ribbon-blues/201308/breast-cancer-concept-brand-pink-ribbon-logo> [<https://perma.cc/YUF6-ZCWX>].

year).<sup>33</sup> But fear is a powerful motivator, especially when combined with the upbeat, positive tone of many breast cancer awareness campaigns. For example, Avon Walk for Breast Cancer advertisements feature smiling white women, festooned in pink boas, sashes, and face paint, while pink text advertises that for ten years “WE’VE BEEN . . . LOVING LAUGHING HOPING STRIVING IN IT TO END IT.”<sup>34</sup> This advertisement emphasizes the struggle of ending breast cancer—for ten years, the ad says, these women have been striving to end it (and saying implicitly that there is no end in sight).<sup>35</sup> At the same time, the ad posits that the fight against breast cancer is a joyous one: breast cancer is not about taxing rounds of chemotherapy, unending medical bills, and painful operations; rather, it is about sisterhood, togetherness, and love. And the way that these women are fighting breast cancer is by participating in the Avon Walk: the women put themselves, and the branded products that signify that this walk is about breast cancer, on display for all to see. Together, such fear and hope, presented in breast cancer marketing, positions the disease as an inescapable force, something that will eventually happen to all women, but that women can fix by participating (with a smile!) in buying products.

And, in reality, it works. For example, in 1998 Yoplait partnered with Komen to create the “Save Lids, Save Lives” campaign. Every October, the company sells yogurt topped with pink lids. Customers send the lids to a collection center, and Yoplait donates 10 cents per lid to Komen, with a guaranteed minimum donation of \$500,000 and a cap of \$1.5 million. In 2008, Yoplait consumers redeemed over 15 million lids—hitting the cap and yielding \$5.9 million in sales for Yoplait. That year, Yoplait reported a 15 percent sales jump.<sup>36</sup>

On one hand, there is nothing wrong with breast cancer awareness. Avon Walks bring survivors and their families together and offer a positive community for those affected by breast cancer. The Yoplait partnership raised money to help a nonprofit. But at the same time, there is something insidious about this marketing. As breast cancer awareness cause marketing has increased, there has been a parallel increase in criticism over its practice.

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33. *Id.*

34. Gayle A. Sulik, *Riding the Tails of the Pink Ribbon*, OUPBLOG (Oct. 10, 2013), <https://blog.oup.com/2013/10/pink-ribbon-breast-cancer-branding> [<https://perma.cc/LY7V-253A>].

35. *Id.*

36. *Cause Marketing*, *supra* note 10.

## 2. The Pushback to the Pink Ribbon

While corporations reap profits and gain new customers from breast cancer awareness marketing campaigns, some have sounded the alarm over this practice. Breast Cancer Action, a watchdog group for breast cancer cause marketing, coined the term “pink-washing” to refer to an organization that promotes breast cancer awareness while producing, manufacturing, or selling products linked to the disease.<sup>37</sup> Pinkwashing thus allows companies to engender goodwill and avoid criticism for behavior that implicates women’s wellbeing by embracing a cause generally considered noncontroversial and unobjectionable. For example, Yoplait was criticized for promoting breast cancer awareness while making yogurt from milk stimulated with the growth hormone rGBH, consumption of which has been linked to breast cancer.<sup>38</sup> Similarly, the National Football League (NFL) has come under criticism for refusing to appropriately address allegations of domestic abuse by its players and employees, all the while promoting breast cancer awareness as a means to recruit more female viewers.<sup>39</sup>

Nonprofits like Komen have championed mammograms as *the* way to detect and halt breast cancer, but their efficacy has also been challenged. A 2016 study found that, as more women have undergone routine mammograms, breast cancer has been detected more often. However, the mammograms usually revealed small tumors that, even without treatment, would never threaten the health of the woman.<sup>40</sup> The detection of larger, more aggressive breast cancers was unchanged in frequency between pre-mammogram and more recent time periods.<sup>41</sup> But because of the push for mammograms from organizations like Komen, women are

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37. *Think Before You Pink Toolkit*, BREAST CANCER ACTION (2012), <https://bcaction.org/site-content/uploads/2010/11/2012-Think-Before-You-Pink-Toolkit.pdf> [<https://perma.cc/NC8L-4AUL>].

38. *The Connection Between rBGH and Breast Cancer*, BREAST CANCER ACTION, <http://thinkbeforeyoupink.org/past-campaigns/about/dairy-breast-cancer> [<https://perma.cc/ULN6-9S66>].

39. Lindsay H. Jones, *NFL Continues Reach for Female Fans Through Breast Cancer Awareness*, USA TODAY SPORTS (Sept. 30, 2014), <https://www.usatoday.com/story/sports/nfl/2014/09/30/nfl-breast-cancer-awareness/16508773> [<https://perma.cc/VJ95-NC8Z>]. See also Ann Friedman, *How Breast Cancer Won the Battle for October*, THE CUT (Oct. 4, 2013), <https://www.thecut.com/2013/10/how-breast-cancer-won-the-battle-for-october.html> [<https://perma.cc/7YS4-8A76>].

40. H.G. Welch et al., *Breast-Cancer Tumor Size, Overdiagnosis, and Mammography Screening Effectiveness*, 375 NEW ENG. J. OF MED. 1438, 1438–39 (2016).

41. *Id.*

undergoing these costly procedures more often, and experiencing the accompanying worry and stress, without receiving much benefit.

Furthermore, breast cancer awareness marketing focuses too much on eradicating the disease rather than preventing its occurrence. This could be because many corporations engaging in breast cancer awareness cause marketing, like Yoplait, may be causing these cancers. A study of environmental determinants of breast cancer identified exposure to phthalates in plastics and cosmetics, parabens in personal care products and deodorants, and a wide range of agricultural and industrial chemicals as potentially carcinogenic.<sup>42</sup> But many of these studies were conducted outside of the United States, suggesting a dearth of domestic studies on the causes of breast cancer.<sup>43</sup> However, in 2010, President Obama's Cancer Panel declared that "the true burden of environmentally induced cancer has been grossly underestimated [and] . . . the American people—even before they are born—are bombarded continually with myriad combinations of these dangerous exposures."<sup>44</sup> Because breast cancer awareness in the United States is so focused on detection and treatment, it is difficult to imagine that the paradigm will shift towards addressing the root causes of the disease.

Finally, breast cancer awareness cause marketing can entrench gender stereotypes and present an inaccurate face to the disease. At worst, the gender politics in these awareness campaigns can be shockingly regressive. Sex sells, even when it's about cancer: "Save the Boobies!" screams a Komen-affiliated website,<sup>45</sup> suggesting that the real losers in the fight against breast cancer are not women, but the heterosexual men who take pleasure in their bodies. It also neutralizes the political and medical reality of breast cancer—a disease that requires costly treatment and can result in disfigurement. In Komen and Avon literature, the faces of breast cancer are those of comely white women, often with children, laughing and smiling. Even by focusing on survivorship, these campaigns forget women who died from breast cancer because of inadequate treatment and access to healthcare.<sup>46</sup>

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42. Robert A. Hiatt & Julia Green Brody, *Environmental Determinants of Breast Cancer*, 39 ANN. REV. PUBLIC HEALTH 113, 120–21 (2018).

43. See, e.g., *id.* at 120 (citing studies in Mexico and Taiwan showing a correlation between phthalate exposure and breast cancer).

44. PRESIDENT'S CANCER PANEL, REDUCING ENVIRONMENTAL RISK FACTORS: WHAT WE CAN DO NOW 2008–2009 ANNUAL REPORT (2010).

45. SAVE THE BOOBIES, <https://www.savetheboobiesny.com/index.php> [https://perma.cc/A23C-AM8N].

46. Of course, this also forgets that men can and do get breast cancer.

In less than 100 years, breast cancer has evolved from an unspoken-of affliction to the subject of a concentrated, corporate-led social movement. Because of corporate cause marketing and the work of organizations like Komen, breast cancer awareness is as much a part of American culture as the Kardashians (and it may be just as problematic). The social capital that breast cancer cause marketing brought to the private sector may have inspired the public sector to start their own breast cancer cause marketing campaign: the breast cancer research stamp.

## II. THE BREAST CANCER RESEARCH STAMP

By the mid-1990s, breast cancer awareness cause marketing was endemic in the private sector, and it presented product consumption as a means of ending breast cancer. Yoplait had encouraged Americans to purchase their Komen-affiliated products as a way of giving back to the world, and the NFL had connected watching football with supporting the cause. To consume meant to be a foot soldier in the battle against breast cancer. As a result, the popular image of breast cancer became one of pink ribbons, corporate backing, and saving lives by being conscious consumers. It was against this backdrop that the Breast Cancer Research Stamp (BCRS) came into existence.

This Part of the Article will describe the passage of the BCRS and detail how it mirrored private sector cause marketing efforts. It will also compare the BCRS to the few other semipostal stamps that Congress has issued, in order to better understand why the BCRS has persisted and the others have not.

### A. *The Passage of the Breast Cancer Research Stamp*

The BCRS was the first semipostal stamp—a stamp created not by the Post Office, but by an act of Congress, and whose funds go towards a particular cause—in U.S. history.<sup>47</sup> It was created through the Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act (Stamp Act), which Congress enacted in 1997.<sup>48</sup> The Stamp Act was first introduced by California senator Dianne Feinstein, after Dr. Ernie Bodai, a California breast

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Biological men make up about one percent of all breast cancer patients. *Male Breast Cancer*, National Breast Cancer Foundation, Inc., <https://www.nationalbreastcancer.org/male-breast-cancer> [<https://perma.cc/6C5A-DE24>]. Breast cancer may also affect trans men and gender nonconforming people. Positioning breast cancer as purely female, therefore, masks the variety of genders who may be affected by this disease.

47. *Id.* (semipostal stamps are postage stamps that raise funds for a cause).

48. Stamp Out Breast Cancer Act, 39 U.S.C.A. § 101 (1997).

cancer doctor, lobbied her to introduce the bill.<sup>49</sup> The Stamp Act stipulates that 70 percent of proceeds from the stamp surcharge be directed to the National Institute of Health (NIH) for breast cancer research and 30 percent to the Department of Defense for the same purpose.<sup>50</sup> Congress reauthorized the Stamp Act in 2015, extending the sales period through December 31, 2019.<sup>51</sup>

Since passing the Stamp Act, Congress has authorized the United States Postal Service (USPS) to issue three more semipostal stamps, which raised funds for 9/11 first responders, family violence prevention, and endangered species.<sup>52</sup> All three of those semipostal stamps have since lapsed and only one—the endangered species stamp—was reauthorized at all.<sup>53</sup> Only the BCRS has been continually reauthorized.

The Congressional record detailing the passage of the Stamp Act shows that members of Congress were lifting their rhetoric directly from private sector breast cancer awareness cause marketing, speaking about the powers of consumerism to end breast cancer. Congressional remarks called for the original bill to emphasize the need for “public awareness and research funds.”<sup>54</sup> Senator Feinstein characterized the stamp as an opportunity for citizens to “conveniently contribute to federal research and to finding a cure for the breast cancer epidemic.”<sup>55</sup> She described the BCRS as “a unique public [and] private partnership” that was targeted to addressing the “extraordinarily serious” problem of breast cancer.<sup>56</sup> In fact, the statements of many of the Stamp Act’s proponents focus on how frightening breast cancer is, how pervasive it is, and how little research there is on its causes and cures.<sup>57</sup> The passage of the

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49. 143 CONG. REC. S8040–01, S8040, 1997 WL 413996, at \*1 (1997). As an unimportant but interesting fact, Dr. Bodai has railed against breast cancer groups that criticized the BCRS, saying that those organizations were “run by strong female personalities” who “don’t like me because I’m male.” Marc Beishon, *Record-Breaking Stamp Raises Sticky Questions*, CANCER WORLD (Nov.–Dec. 2006), [https://cancerworld.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/6948\\_32\\_35\\_cw15\\_Spotligh-Bodai.pdf](https://cancerworld.net/wp-content/uploads/2017/07/6948_32_35_cw15_Spotligh-Bodai.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/V9GG-6QWD>].

50. 39 U.S.C.A. § 101 (1997).

51. Breast Cancer Research Stamp Reauthorization Act of 2015, Pub. L. No. 114–99, sec. 2, § 414, 129 Stat 2201 (2015).

52. KEVIN R. KOSAR & PAMELA A. HAIRSTON, CONG. RESEARCH SERV., RS20921, SEMI-POSTAL STAMPS: AUTHORIZATION, REVENUE, AND SELECTION PROCESS (2006).

53. Multinational Species Conservation Funds Semipostal Stamp Reauthorization Act of 2013, Pub. L. No. 113–165, 128 Stat. 1878 (2014).

54. *Id.*

55. 143 CONG. REC. S8040–01, S8040, 1997 WL 413996, at \*2 (1997).

56. *Id.*

57. *Id.*

Stamp Act is characterized as a bipartisan success, as demonstrated by Senator Feinstein pointing out and thanking her Republican colleague, Al D'Amato, for wearing a pink ribbon during the debate.<sup>58</sup>

In many of the reauthorization acts, the Congressional record mentions the need to raise awareness of breast cancer. For instance, in 2005, Senator Lee Baca noted, “[b]y supporting reauthorization of this stamp, you are not only helping research but you are also helping to raise awareness . . . A customer purchases the stamp, a carrier delivers it, and a person receives it. That is three people who have seen the message saying: breast cancer needs to be stamped out!”<sup>59</sup> Proponents of reauthorization viewed the stamp as a means of encouraging Americans to contribute to philanthropic causes. For example, Republican Representative Susan Molinari told the House, “I believe the American people will rise to the challenge of saying if we make it easy for you, if we make it an opportunity in your daily life of completing chores to donate to breast cancer, they will all absolutely rise to that challenge.”<sup>60</sup>

By focusing on a need for awareness and emphasizing that women should fear the “epidemic” of breast cancer, the congressional record on the BCRS reflects the rhetoric of private sector breast cancer cause marketing. While it is certainly positive that Congress is committed to funding breast cancer research in this way, why create a special postage stamp rather than directly allocate funds?

#### B. *The BCRS as Compared to Other Semipostal Stamps*

A comparison of the BCRS and other semipostal stamps proves useful in examining how the government was able to utilize private sector cause marketing strategies to ensure the success of the BCRS. Following the BCRS, two other semipostal stamps were introduced as part of the Treasury and General Government Appropriations Act of 2002: the Heroes of 9/11 Stamp and the Stop Family Violence Stamp. The Heroes of 2001 Stamp, which was sold from June 7, 2002 through December 31, 2004, raised money for the Federal Emergency Management Service (FEMA) to provide assistance to the families of the emergency relief personnel killed or permanently disabled in connection with the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.<sup>61</sup> In contrast, the Stop Family Violence

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58. *Id.*

59. 151 CONG. REC. H9330-01, H9331, 2005 WL 2805660 (2005).

60. *Id.*

61. *Heroes of 2001 Semipostal Stamp*, UNITED STATES POSTAL SERVICE, <https://about.usps.com/postal-bulletin/2002/html/pb22076/kit.html> [https://perma.cc/MXW2-ZG7Y].

Stamp, which was sold from 2003 to 2006, did not specify where the money would go.

While the BCRS sold at a relatively high and consistent level over time, the other two stamps initially sold well before sales steeply declined.<sup>62</sup> A Government Accountability Office report linked these sales trends to three issues: (1) the charitable cause each stamp promoted, (2) the early and continued involvement of advocacy groups in promoting each stamp, and (3) each stamp's design and marketing.<sup>63</sup>

All of these issues pointed to why the BCRS was successful. First, when the BCRS was issued, breast cancer was perceived as an ongoing health issue, and it thus had widespread support.<sup>64</sup> The Heroes of 9/11 stamp, which dealt with a highly visible, catastrophic event, saw major sales early on, but lost momentum as public attention for 9/11 responders and victims waned.<sup>65</sup> The Stop Family Violence stamp, which addressed an issue that warranted a complex response and stirred up many emotions in potential consumers, never gained much support and, as would be expected, thus sold poorly.<sup>66</sup>

Second, advocacy groups rallied behind the BCRS to an extent unmatched by the other stamps. For example, Komen featured the stamp in its newsletter, which had a readership of one million people.<sup>67</sup> In contrast, groups addressing issues of family violence or victims of 9/11 engaged in no enduring efforts to promote the other semipostal stamps.<sup>68</sup>

Third, the BCRS's design and marketing spurred higher sales. The stamp, with an image of a woman modeled after the goddess Diana, looked classy and inviting.<sup>69</sup> Similarly, the Heroes of 9/11 stamp featured the compelling and highly-publicized image of firefighters raising the flag at Ground Zero.<sup>70</sup> The Stop Family Violence stamp, on the other hand, had a child's drawing of a person crying and raising their hands as if to call for help—a disturbing image that few consumers wanted on their mail.<sup>71</sup>

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62. U.S. GOV'T ACCOUNTABILITY OFF., GAO-05-953, U.S. POSTAL SERVICE: FACTORS AFFECTING FUND-RAISING STAMP SALES SUGGEST LESSONS LEARNED (2005).

63. *Id.* at 6–7.

64. *Id.* at 6.

65. *Id.*

66. *Id.*

67. *Id.* at 7.

68. *Id.*

69. *Id.* at 9.

70. *Id.*

71. *Id.*



The Stop Family Violence stamp was a clear example of a failed semipostal stamp. The BCRS and the Heroes of 9/11 stamp provided two alternative views of what a successful semipostal stamp could look like: one longterm and one short-term. With the Heroes of 9/11 Stamp, there was also a built-in incentive to stop issuing the stamp after a certain time. If it was sold for too long, it could look as though the federal government was having trouble caring for the victims of the attacks. Phasing out the stamp could then be a symbol for phasing out the heightened need for consumption after 9/11, signaling a return to normalcy. In essence, both the issuance of the stamp and the *end* of issuance were in the government's interest. While 9/11 was a standalone event, the private sector had already presented breast cancer as a prolonged fight with no end other than total eradication of the disease. There was thus no similar incentive for the government to phase out the BCRS. In fact, once it was introduced, there was an incentive to keep it in circulation for as long as people kept getting breast cancer.

Furthermore, the success of the BCRS and Heroes of 2001 was rooted in another factor: consumption. Specifically, consumption was an essential part of the domestic response to 9/11. As Samantha King points out in *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, the Bush administration told everyday Americans that the best way they could help the nation recover was by shopping and volunteering.<sup>72</sup> The Heroes of 9/11 stamp thus provided a quick and easy way for Americans to do what their government encouraged them to do. But similar to the 9/11 response, the prevailing response to breast cancer was one rooted in consumption. People were already buying breast cancer awareness-themed yogurts, cars, wigs, shoes, and windshield wipers, and stamps were an easy addition into this existing trove of mammogramophilic memorabilia. In effect, the BCRS showed that the public sector endorsed breast cancer awareness marketing and intended to capitalize on it.

While the government has often borrowed strategies from the private sector to improve its efficiency and responsiveness, its adoption of cause marketing with the BCRS may not be so beneficial. In the next Part of this Article, I problematize the BCRS and conclude that, as an example of cause marketing, it is at best a virtue-signaling platitude and at worst, a distraction from Congress's unwillingness to directly fund and support breast cancer research.

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72. KING, *supra* note 15, at 63.

C. *The BCRS and the Dangers of Breast Cancer Awareness Marketing in Government*

Due to the perfidy of breast cancer awareness marketing in the United States, an individual likely goes into the post office already primed with the knowledge that breast cancer is a worthy, uncontroversial, and expected cause. That same individual needs to pay only a few extra cents for the BCRS, rather than a regular stamp, to reap the benefits of voluntarism. Therefore, the sale of the BCRS bypasses the slow and bloated Congressional workings that direct funding would require, and allows Congress to act with the efficiency of the private sector. When viewed through this lens, the BCRS is a sensible and inventive solution to a serious national health problem.

But this also demonstrates just how dissimilar the BCRS is from other Congressional funding projects. Why does Congress ask the postal service to raise money for disease research? Why not raise taxes and ensure that money from the tax increase goes directly to breast cancer research? Why not reallocate money in the yearly appropriations bills? And out of all the diseases threatening women's health, why choose breast cancer?

When assessing these questions, an overarching problem emerges: when Congress adopts the values of cause marketing, the accompanying focus on consumerism and volunteerism invades the administrative state. This, in turn, threatens to disturb how Congress thinks about funding different agencies and how agencies may think about how to allocate that funding.

1. *An Easy Political Decision, A Guaranteed Appeal to Voters*

The BCRS was passed and has been reauthorized multiple times with wide bipartisan support. Mary Vavrus suggests that between 1992 and 1996, a shift occurred around the discourse on women voters.<sup>73</sup> In 1992, the “Year of the Woman,” women were portrayed as the wielders of political power. Essentially, women were recognized as having more independent political power to shift policy, elect new leaders, and generally make their voices heard. But, by 1996, they had been relegated to “soccer moms,” still a politically powerful group of swing voters, but ones defined by their filial obligations.<sup>74</sup> While 1992 celebrated “the Woman”—a self-interested, self-advocating, individual voter that politicians needed

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73. Mary D. Vavrus, *From Women of the Year to “Soccer Moms”*: *The Case of the Incredible Shrinking Woman*, 17 POL. COMM. 193, 194 (2000).

74. *Id.*

to appeal—1996's "soccer moms" were an amorphous collective defined by their families. Women's issues, Vavrus argues, devolved along with this conception of women: while women's issues in 1992 may have included equal pay, workplace opportunities, and ending sexual harassment, in 1996, women's issues concerned childcare and how best to provide a solid home life. Accompanying this shift was a new conceptualization of politics as a subset of consumer behavior, in which one's political affiliation was a matter of personal choices around consumption and lifestyle.<sup>75</sup> Similar to cause marketing, in which products became tied to nonprofit causes, products could also become tied to political stances. Just like buying certain shoes could signify that a woman was cool, or sexy, or tough, buying certain items could suggest that she was a Republican or a Democrat.

In this consumer-focused context, it made sense for politicians to promote breast cancer awareness. First, breast cancer was feared by a powerful demographic of voters who had been primed to buy products with which they associated their own political identity. Women cared about their health and recognized that breast cancer was a threat. In order to reach women voters, then, politicians could champion breast cancer awareness and garner goodwill—perhaps instead of adopting more targeted, pro-women policies that were not so easily palatable. Second, breast cancer awareness was already driven by major companies, allowing politicians to connect and make allies in the highest echelons of the private sphere and piggyback on existing breast cancer awareness goodwill. Lastly, breast cancer awareness was a noncontroversial issue that allowed politicians to appear "pro-woman" even if they supported anti-abortion policies or opposed childcare or equal pay measures. Expressly supporting the BCRS was therefore an easy and savvy political choice.

## 2. The BCRS as Good (Small) Government

By encouraging private philanthropy and voluntary donations rather than directly allocating funds to breast cancer research, the BCRS aligns with and supports traditional neoliberal views of good government as small government. By selling the BCRS, Congress has effectively guaranteed some amount of money to always be allocated to breast cancer research regardless of the political realities of their two chambers. In an age when congressional spending is closely scrutinized, the BCRS is a backdoor to funding an important cause that tugs at American heartstrings without raising taxes.

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75. *Id.*

No member of Congress could be accused of being in favor of big government by supporting the BCRS. The stamp raised funds for federal programs without Congress actually spending money. That the BCRS would be profitable was almost built into the program: stamps were cheap to produce and would sell at a premium. In *Pink Ribbons, Inc.*, Samantha King describes the BCRS as an example of public spending couched inherently in the language of “government for good”: it incentivized individual generosity and voluntary philanthropy, rather than being “wasteful” direct government spending.<sup>76</sup> In essence, the BCRS is good because it shows that the government can act like a private company.

### III. BY REORIENTING THE FIGHT AGAINST BREAST CANCER TO INDIVIDUAL CONSUMERS, THE BCRS REPLACES THOUGHTFUL, DIRECT CONGRESSIONAL FUNDING TO BREAST CANCER EXPERTS

In “The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure,” Terry Moe describes the relationship between politics, bureaucracy, and government efficiency.<sup>77</sup> As Moe describes it, an interest group dictates the kinds of structure that politicians ultimately adopt for its respective causes.<sup>78</sup> While a dominant group may be able to exert a massive amount of political influence, it may not know which governmental measures are required to reach its goals.<sup>79</sup> So, instead of drafting proposed legislation itself, the group encourages the government to adopt more general legislation, expecting government-employed experts to fill in the details later on.<sup>80</sup> But this strategy can be risky if those government experts do not act in the ways that the interest group desires.<sup>81</sup> To address this risk, the group will hire experts of their own to lead government projects that they wish to closely control.<sup>82</sup> These experts may see themselves as independent decisionmakers, but the interest group views them as under its control.<sup>83</sup> This structure allows the government bureaucracy to function by creating a balance of expert opinion, governmental functioning, and outside influence.

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76. KING, *supra* note 15, at 67.

77. Terry Moe, *The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure*, in *CAN THE GOVERNMENT GOVERN?* 267 (John E. Chubb & Paul E. Peterson eds., Brookings Institution 1989).

78. *Id.* at 269.

79. *Id.* at 270.

80. *Id.* at 271.

81. *Id.* at 272.

82. *Id.* at 273.

83. *Id.*

The BCRS undermines Moe's theory because it does not involve the work of any experts. While government-employed scientists at the National Cancer Institute may have some control over who receives money from the BCRS and who does not, they are left out of discussions around how much funding is needed for breast cancer research, what projects need to be funded, and when those funds are needed. Similarly, experts in postage were not consulted when the BCRS was first introduced. Since this was the first semipostal stamp, it would have been useful to know stamp sales in general, the profit margins in designing a new stamp, and the expected revenue for the BCRS. None of this happened.

Instead, the BCRS was introduced into Congress after a single senator heard from a single constituent about the idea. While that may make it sound like a grassroots idea, the BCRS's imagery and marketing reflect instead Komen's and Avon's private sector approaches. This is demonstrated by: (1) the use of the phrase "breast cancer awareness;" (2) the BCRS's focus on research into treatment and cures, rather than prevention; (3) the use of ribbons and the color pink in order to target a female audience; and (4) the Congressional record, which shows members of Congress using the same fearmongering statistics and appeals to mothers that are common in private sector breast cancer awareness campaigns.

These actions are not indicative of expertise in breast cancer research. The Congressional record is silent on whether anyone from either chamber consulted medical researchers on how Congress could directly benefit their research in a targeted, efficient manner. Instead, the BCRS makes researchers reliant on stamp purchases for breast cancer research funding. Rather than the assurance of direct funding from Congress, experts have to hope that individual Americans will send enough mail—and choose the BCRS over cheaper stamps—for them to complete their projects. This uncertainty threatens the efficiency of breast cancer research, especially in the age of the Internet, when physical mail is less common. Instead of appropriating those funds directly, Congress has instead adopted the private sector tactics of Komen, Avon, and other breast cancer awareness advocacy groups by speaking in broad platitudes about the need for awareness and putting the onus on individuals to eradicate breast cancer. By reinforcing the idea that the fight against breast cancer hinges on individual awareness and action, Congress has reframed breast cancer as an issue that does not need to be handled with expertise. Rather, it is an issue that anyone, anywhere, can help solve by buying a stamp.

When the government adopts this private sector strategy, it implies that expertise is no longer necessary to pass meaningful legislation. According to Moe's logic, the fact that the BCRS lacks a clear goal is symptomatic of the lack of expert consultation in creating it. More insidiously, it suggests that medicine, a highly technical field reliant on expert advice, is vulnerable to misinformation and to the pressures of cause marketing. In this way, the BCRS is an example of the devaluation of experience and expertise in the government. As Moe explains, this devaluation threatens the functioning of the bureaucratic system writ large by deprioritizing efficiency: rather than experts in medicine and governmental procedure balancing the interests of outside groups, the breast cancer narrative has been entirely directed by groups whose marketing strategies shift the focus from targeted research and development to individual, non-expert consumption.

When the government follows the private sector in treating breast cancer as a marketing tool and not a problem to be solved, it skews important healthcare issues in a manner that could cause irreparable harm to American women. Following the private sector's lead exposes governmental breast cancer research to the same criticisms as corporate cause marketing: it unfairly burdens the individual consumer, detracts from the role that the government can and should play in funding and directing breast cancer research, and emphasizes reactive treatment rather than addressing the cancer's root causes.

A. *By Adopting Private Sector Language, the BCRS Aligns Congress With Breast Cancer Awareness, Rather Than Breast Cancer Research and Treatment*

In "The Politics of Bureaucratic Structure," Moe discusses the extraordinary power interest groups can exert over politicians.<sup>84</sup> Legislators are regularly bombarded with requests from special interests on a range of issues, and they need to align themselves with whatever issues (at whatever times) will best support their bids for reelection.<sup>85</sup> Therefore, legislators tend to value "particularized control: they want to be able to intervene quickly, inexpensively, and in ad hoc ways to protect or advance the interests of particular clients in particular matters."<sup>86</sup> Because certain special interest groups can be especially helpful for reelection, legislators may

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84. *Id.* at 277.

85. *Id.* at 278.

86. *Id.*

represent and advance their interests in Congress even before any requests have been made.<sup>87</sup>

The BCRS is a clear example of particularized control. An inexpensive stamp that aligns Congress with a popular cause is a powerful chit for legislators in both chambers, as it can be leveraged to garner future financial support. This demonstrates how the public sector capitalizes on existing, problematic private sector schemes and structures for its own benefit. For example, literature about the stamp on Senator Feinstein's website features the very same pink color scheme and archive of survival stories found in corporate cause marketing from Komen and Avon, illustrating how public actors advance the interests of the breast cancer awareness groups.<sup>88</sup>

#### B. *The Government: Signaling Virtue While Doing the Least*

The passage of the BCRS might also be seen as Congress's attempt to garner some of the goodwill the private sector reaps by engaging in breast cancer awareness campaigns. When it created the BCRS, Congress crafted a bipartisan success story: even though the chambers of Congress were currently at odds, it was able to pass a law that gave hope to millions of women. Raising funds to help combat breast cancer was uncontroversial, and perhaps, unifying. Whether it was necessary, meaningful, or an appropriate use of Congressional time and energy remain unanswered, but such an inquiry would beg the question: why shouldn't Congress fund breast cancer awareness?

This lack of scrutiny demonstrates the trust the public has in the breast cancer awareness movement. Breast cancer awareness campaigns have been met with wide support and even wider levels of public consumption. By aligning with such a popular cause, the government receives the goodwill those campaigns generate. Additionally, by sharing the burden of funding breast cancer research with individual citizens, Congress also insulates itself from criticism for not sufficiently funding breast cancer research. In other words, by providing a method for individual consumers to give to breast cancer research, the BCRS puts the onus on the American people, rather than their government, to meet the challenge.

The dearth of studies on the environmental causes of breast cancer suggests that special interests are winning out over quality

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87. *Id.* at 277.

88. U.S. Senator Diane Feinstein, *Breast Cancer Research Stamp*, [https://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/\\_cache/files/f/3/f3db81b3-da96-42fe-b757-e27ff6e5fe1e/FEDE1A37BECCEC311135260637981B80.breast-cancer-book-let-2016.pdf](https://www.feinstein.senate.gov/public/_cache/files/f/3/f3db81b3-da96-42fe-b757-e27ff6e5fe1e/FEDE1A37BECCEC311135260637981B80.breast-cancer-book-let-2016.pdf) [<https://perma.cc/35XU-R7RJ>].

research. As powerful as the breast cancer awareness lobby is, its influence pales in comparison to that of the agriculture, dairy, and oil industries—all of whom use chemicals that may be linked to breast cancer. Thus, banning rGBH is likely not in the best interest of lawmakers who rely on the dairy industry for electoral support. The innocuous BCRS offers no such threat to an elected official seeking another term in office. Thus, the stamp signals endorsement of the breast cancer awareness movement without threatening other special interest groups. Terry Moe would likely say that this is rational legislative behavior. While it may be rational, it nonetheless shows that special interests have so influenced governmental action on breast cancer that “awareness” may now be the overarching narrative of the disease not just in the private sector, but in the public sector as well.

### CONCLUSION

Breast cancer is the most common occurring cancer in women, and it kills one in 31.5 women.<sup>89</sup> Without a doubt, it is a serious and debilitating illness that deserves an intense campaign to find its causes and cures. But while many people believe it to be the foremost threat to women’s health, it is not. The leading killer of women is cardiovascular disease—which many women know little about.<sup>90</sup> So, why aren’t red ribbons as ubiquitous as the pink ones that festoon public and private sector initiatives to raise awareness for breast cancer?

The answer may lie in the fact that, when it comes to women’s health issues, breast cancer awareness already controls the space. Pink ribbons already decorate supermarket products in every aisle, adorn television ads, and appear on Walks for the Cure across the country. With the breast cancer research stamp, Congress has joined the movement. By implementing a private sector cause marketing scheme for a new consumable good, Congress reaps private sector rewards as a public actor. Until we disrupt the narrative around breast cancer, and until we prioritize expert input over corporate influence, we risk a proliferation of pink ribbons at the expense of meaningful advances.

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89. *Cancer State Facts: Female Breast Cancer*, NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE: SURVEILLANCE, EPIDEMIOLOGY, AND END RESULTS PROGRAM (2019), <https://seer.cancer.gov/statfacts/html/breast.html> [<https://perma.cc/8DUS-LV7D>].

90. Laxmi S. Mehta et al., *Cardiovascular Disease and Breast Cancer: Where These Entities Intersect*, CIRCULATION: AHA SCIENTIFIC STATEMENT (Feb. 20, 2018), <https://www.ahajournals.org/doi/pdf/10.1161/CIR.0000000000000556> [<https://perma.cc/7ZEX-7D5L>].



