

November 3, 2009

Dear Committee Chairs:

Our organizations represent a diverse group of patient, labor, consumer, public interest, scientific integrity, taxpayer, journalism, and transparency advocates. Although our groups have varied agendas, we all recognize that the pending health care bill has enormous consequences for our respective constituencies.

Congress is poised to pass changes in our health care system that will affect every American family. As chairman of a key committee working on health care legislation, you have grappled with questions concerning the quality, affordability and accessibility of health care in this country.

Of necessity, this legislation is complicated. Health care bills in both chambers create several advisory committees to help federal agencies deal with the implementation of this significant new law.

Because these advisory panels will play major roles on issues ranging from immunization practices and clinical research to health care financing and the development of the health care labor force, we urge you to ensure that members of these panels perform their duties with full transparency and free of financial conflicts of interest.

The American public will be ill-served if these advisory committees operate behind closed doors and are influenced by members with financial ties to special interests with a stake in their deliberations.

At a minimum, all advisory panels created by any final health care law should:

- Require that all information about each advisory panel, including a full audio or video record of each panel meeting, is accessible via the Internet;
- Actively seek out advisory panel members without conflicts of interest;
- Assess financial conflicts of interest, and strive to name only non-conflicted experts to advisory committees;
- When conflicts are unavoidable, require that any waivers given to a conflicted advisory board member and the reasons for granting the waiver are part of the public record; and,
- Specifically require disclosure of the names and backgrounds of each member, and whether they are serving as experts or to represent particular constituencies.

An effective health care plan depends on advisory committees that give fact-based guidance and operate in full view of the American public. We urge you to incorporate these reforms into any final bill.

Sincerely,

John Gage  
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Wayne C. Shields  
CEO/President  
Association of Reproductive Health Professionals

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