

November 4, 2003

The Honorable Henry A. Waxman
United States House of Representatives
2204 RHOB Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Waxman:

The National Hispanic Medical Association, as well as the Hispanic-Serving Health Professions Schools, Inc., supports and appreciates your efforts to continue government-funded medical research at the National Institute of Health. Our organizations share your commitment to the many issues that provide improved health care to minority populations and all Americans.

Minority Americans disproportionately suffer from many diseases. In the areas of reducing disease and disease-related complications, research funding has reduced deaths to cancer, diabetes, strokes and heart disease, HIV/AIDS infant mortality, and others. The efforts of NIH have made tremendous progress in these areas, although there is still a long way to.

We oppose most vehemently the attack on already approved or funded projects at NIH as raised by the conservative members of Congress. Although the NIH alerted more than 150 researchers that their government-funded studies were under scrutiny, the truth is that the merits of only 10 studies were actually questioned by the members of Congress. This attack was brought into play by the Traditional Values Coalition, a group that has opposed many funded projects over the years. Even some conservative members have questioned the longer list that reportedly came from the Coalition, and its ulterior motives. As the Dayton Daily News editorial says, "But the politicians can't run scared just because a religious organization that has a simplistic view about how to promote public health is grabbing headlines." The editorial continues, "The Coalition isn't really interested in specific grants, its agenda is more political than practical."

We applaud that NIH spokesman John T. Burklow stated that NIH stands behind its peer-review process. Congress has asked NIH to explain the medical benefits hoped for from the studies, and NIH is in the process of doing so. This should serve to clear up misunderstanding on the projects.

Please feel free to call me at (202) 628-5895 should you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Elena Rios, MD, MSPH