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November 13, 2003

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Ave, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

Thank you for your quick response to my letter of October 27 on the “hit list” of more than 150 scientists and 200 grants funded by the National Institutes of Health. I am glad to receive your assurance that the Department of Health and Human Services did not create this list. Nonetheless, important questions remain unanswered — both about the specific list of projects and about the broader question of the injection of ideology and politics into science.

On the specific issue of the list, I wrote to you on October 28 for more information about any contacts between HHS and the Traditional Values Coalition (TVC). TVC is the conservative group that says it created the list and handed it to Energy and Commerce Committee Chair Billy Tauzin.¹ I continue to seek an answer to this question.

I also asked you to speak out against what this list stands for: the targeting of senior scientists from leading U.S. universities and their many peer-reviewed grants on important public health issues. To date, the “hit list” has been denounced by the American Association for the Advancement of Science, the American Association of Medical Colleges, the Association of American Universities, the Association of Schools of Public Health, the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology, and many other leading scientific groups.²

Your spokesman, however, told the *Washington Post* only that HHS supported the scientific process and mission of NIH, and “stopped short of any statement of support for the research projects themselves, saying ‘to get involved in that would not be a responsible thing to

¹Bob Herbert, *The Big Chill at the Lab*, New York Times (Nov. 3, 2003).

²Minority Staff, House Government Reform Committee, *Scientific Organization Statements* (online at http://www.house.gov/reform/min/politicsandscience/nih_support.htm).

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
November 13, 2003
Page 2

do.”³ Given your position of leadership and influence, I continue to urge you to join those who are speaking out against the list and what it represents.

On the broader issue of the injection of politics into science, many questions remain unanswered. Your letter indicates that you are committed to responding meaningfully to members of Congress and states that you “work diligently to find answers and respond promptly.” But in fact, over the last several months, I have written numerous letters to you raising concerns about the politicization of science, and you have either failed to respond or responded incompletely.

Here is a list of some of the letters I have written and the responses that I have received:

- On October 21, 2002, 11 colleagues and I wrote to you about several examples of HHS actions that appeared to subvert scientific decision making and suppress scientific information. The letter asked about the removal of scientific information from HHS websites, the replacement of members on (and the termination of) advisory committees, the nomination process for the FDA’s Reproductive Health Drugs Advisory Committee, and HHS and CDC audits. Your response of November 27 was incomplete. It did not provide requested information on what information has been removed from HHS websites, which advisory committees have seen members replaced, who was recommended to the FDA committee, and what audits and reviews HHS has undertaken.
- On December 18, 2002, I wrote to you that your response to the October 21, 2002 letter was incomplete and unsatisfactory. You have not responded to this letter.
- On February 19, 2003, I wrote with 33 other members of Congress to protest a string of actions by the Administration to promote unproven “abstinence-only” interventions in international HIV/AIDS efforts. In your June 24 response, you provided a general description of the President’s policy but failed to address the specific incidents detailed in the letter.
- On July 8, 2003, I wrote to you that HHS appeared to have revised performance measures for abstinence-only education programs to make these efforts seem successful. I asked that the measures include real-world outcomes such as rates of sexual activity and pregnancy. You have not responded to this letter.
- On August 14, 2003, I wrote to you about a pattern of HHS audits of organizations that provide effective comprehensive sex education programs. This pattern did not extend to programs providing unproven “abstinence-only” interventions. I asked for an accounting

³*NIH Faces Criticism on Grants*, Washington Post (Oct. 30, 2003).

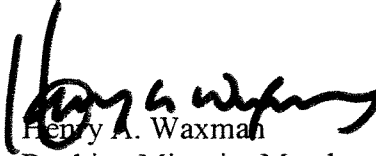
The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
November 13, 2003
Page 3

of your auditing practices with respect to these groups. You have not responded to this letter.

- On September 11, 2003, I wrote with Reps. Hoyer and Pelosi about new CDC policies that appear to undermine the dissemination of effective HIV/AIDS prevention materials. These policies both change the composition of review committees and require an additional and duplicative layer of review. I asked what evidence led CDC to make these changes. You have not responded to this letter.⁴

Your rapid response to my letter of October 27 stands in marked contrast to other letters I have written on very similar topics, and I urge you to respond fully to my October 27 and 28 letters about the "hit list" and to my previous letters of October 21, 2002, December 18, 2002, February 19, 2003, July 8, 2003, August 14, 2003, and September 11, 2003.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member

⁴In response to two additional letters, dated December 18, 2002, and March 14, 2003, you asked others at HHS to write members of Congress about the alteration of information on HHS websites. The return correspondence of CDC Director Dr. Julie Gerberding, who wrote on May 14, and NCI Director Dr. Andrew C. von Eschenbach, who wrote on April 25, was generally responsive.