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DEPUTY WHIP

COMMITTEE ON  
ENERGY AND COMMERCE

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June 24, 2009

The Honorable Kathleen Sebelius  
Secretary of U.S. Department of Health and Human Services  
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20201

Madam Secretary,

Careful Congressional consideration of the health care legislation currently before the Energy and Commerce Committee is vital. The "discussion draft" you testified on this morning will have wider reaching impacts than great society legislation had nearly forty years ago. This is the most seminal legislation in a political generation and the solution it offers should be approached carefully with all necessary information.

Asking fair and legitimate question of the Cabinet Secretary who will be charged with executing this vast new entitlement program is central to that careful consideration. While you were generous with your time with us this morning, I am writing to ask you to return to the Energy and Commerce Committee so that all Members may have an opportunity to question you on this legislation.

Specifically, I am writing to ask that you return to the committee before we move to mark-up the legislation next month. I am aware that there are significant pressures on your schedule, but surely you can make time to ensure that Members have all the information they need as we take action on the President's primary legislative priority.

Concurrently, I am asking that you respond in writing to my questions ahead of any Energy and Commerce mark-up. To state the questions again, I would like to know what lessons the Administration has taken from Tennessee's experiment with "public option" health care; a program known as TennCare. I would also like to know how you see the Medicare Advantage program fitting into the proposed "public option" structure. Finally, in your testimony, you stated that the proposal before us is deficit neutral. That claim is far out of line with the estimates that I have seen. I would appreciate it if you would elaborate further on the impact this plan would have on the deficit.

I was lucky enough to have been able to ask these questions of you in person, though there was not time for you to answer. Unfortunately many of my colleagues were not able to personally engage. The decisions before us are momentous and there is no excuse for making them based on limited information. Nor is there a replacement for the kind of constructive public dialogue a hearing provides. I look forward to seeing you before the Committee soon.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Marsha Blackburn". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping tail on the final letter.

Marsha Blackburn  
Member of Congress