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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

# Congress of the United States

## House of Representatives

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2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

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MAJORITY (202) 225-5051  
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### SUBCOMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT MANAGEMENT, ORGANIZATION AND PROCUREMENT

“9/11 Health: Why Did HHS Cancel Contracts to Manage Responder Health Care?”

10:30 a.m., Tuesday, January 22, 2008

Daniel Patrick Moynihan Federal Court House

New York, NY

### OPENING STATEMENT OF Chairman Edolphus Towns

As we begin our business here today, we should remember back six years ago when toxic clouds of smoke from the World Trade Center hung above lower Manhattan, Brooklyn and other parts of our city. Everyone in America has their own story about that day—where they were, what they were doing, thinking, or feeling on Sept. 11, 2001. But for the emergency responders and recovery workers who worked in and around Ground Zero, that day doesn't just haunt them. For some, it's killing them.

Six and a half years since the attack, we now know that the toxic environment created when the towers collapsed exposed first responders, rescuers, and clean-up workers to a range of dust, smoke, and toxic pollutants. These heroes from across the nation are still dealing with the long term health effects from 9/11. Many are suffering from disease and disability and require medical care. It is our duty as a nation to make sure they get the care they need. Unfortunately, the federal effort to provide health care to these workers has been plagued by false starts, incomplete programs, and funding shortfalls.

In Congress, we've been fighting for permanent, long-term health care for 9/11 workers. My colleagues here today – Congresswoman Maloney, Congressman Nadler, and Congressman Fossella – wrote a bipartisan bill that would guarantee health care for these heroes. Last year, I held three

oversight hearings to bring attention to this issue and hold the Administration accountable for its lack of progress. Last year, Congress approved more than \$100 million of funding for 9/11 health care programs. And last fall, the Administration solicited bids for a center that would manage medical and pharmacy care for 9/11 workers nationwide. So we thought we were finally on the right track.

Then in December, the Administration pulled the plug on this contract just two days before the bids were due. It is really a baffling decision, and they can't even get their stories straight for why it happened. First they said that the bidders were confused. Well, we talked to bidders, who had invested a lot of time and money in their proposals, and they said they were ready to go. Then the Administration said there wasn't enough funding. Well, how could they know that before the bids came in? And what about the \$108 million that Congress provided? The whole thing doesn't make any sense, and that's why I called this hearing today, to get to the bottom of it.

You'll notice there's an empty chair at the witness table. That's because we invited HHS to explain themselves, and they refused to send a witness. They told us nobody was available. This is just unacceptable, and I'm not going to stand for it. Today the Oversight Committee is sending a demand letter for all e-mails, memos, and other documents related to the termination of this contract. If I don't get this information promptly, there will be a subpoena. And then once we've figured out who is responsible, that person will be summoned to testify at another hearing, by subpoena if necessary. We're going to move forward today, and hear from real people who are affected by this HHS decision. It's a shame nobody from the Administration is here to listen.

In my role as Chairman of the Government Management Subcommittee, I try to be fair, and give people the benefit of the doubt. But I've done oversight on a lot of issues, and I'm sorry to say that the HHS program for 9/11 health care is one of the worst managed programs I've seen. The lack of action for these heroes, and the bureaucracy they've had to go through, is simply unacceptable. It is shameful.

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