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2157 RAYBURN HOUSE OFFICE BUILDING

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MAJORITY (202) 225-5074
FACSIMILE (202) 225-3974
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August 22, 2001

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Mr. Paul J. Tagliabue
Commissioner
National Football League
280 Park Avenue
New York, NY 10017

Dear Mr. Tagliabue:

Recent press accounts about football players dying during or immediately following practices or games have alarmed many Americans. So far this year there have been at least eleven deaths, including six high school students, three college players, an NFL player, and an arena football player.¹ News reports have suggested that several of these deaths may be linked to dietary supplements containing ephedrine.²

Medical experts have expressed concerns about ephedrine. According to some experts, ephedrine is a stimulant that may trigger lethal cardiac arrhythmias,³ stroke,⁴ and heatstroke.⁵ I

¹ *Texas Teenager Is Latest Football Player to Die*, Los Angeles Times (Aug. 19, 2001).

² *Player Adds to Wheeler Details*, Los Angeles Times (Aug. 13, 2001); *Supplement Use Hinted In Death*, CNN.com (Aug. 13, 2001).

³ Christine Haller and Neal Benowitz, *Adverse Cardiovascular and Central Nervous System Events Associated With Dietary Supplements Containing Ephedra Alkaloids*, New England Journal of Medicine 1833 (Dec. 21, 2000).

⁴ Christine Haller and Neal Benowitz, *Adverse Cardiovascular and Central Nervous System Events Associated With Dietary Supplements Containing Ephedra Alkaloids*, New England Journal of Medicine 1833 (Dec. 21, 2000).

⁵ According to Dr. Ray Woosley, Vice President for Health Sciences and Dean of the College of Medicine at the University of Arizona, and Dr. Neal Benowitz, Professor of Medicine, Psychiatry, and Biopharmaceutical Sciences and Chief of the Division of Clinical Pharmacology and Toxicology, University of California, San Francisco, ephedrine can contribute to heatstroke in at least two ways: It can exacerbate the dangerous effects of low potassium that can occur as a result of strenuous exercise and augment the effects of adrenaline on blood pressure and heart rate (thereby increasing the workload of the heart), and it can constrict the capillaries, making it more difficult for an over-heated body to cool itself.

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am writing to seek further information about the relationship, if any, between ephedrine use by professional football players and adverse health effects.

According to information I have just obtained from the Food and Drug Administration (FDA), FDA had received 1,422 adverse event reports for supplements containing ephedrine alkaloids as of April 2001. These reports raise further health concerns. They include 81 reports of death, 27 reports of heart attack, and 65 reports of stroke. Data from the American Association of Poison Control Centers analyzed by FDA also contain hundreds of adverse events associated with dietary supplements containing ephedrine alkaloids. The majority of the adverse events in the poison control data involve people under 40. About one third of the events involve people under 19 years old.

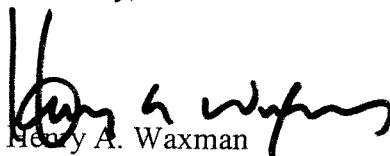
A recently released survey by the NCAA indicates that ephedrine use is on the rise among student-athletes, with almost 4% admitting to use.⁶

I would like to know what steps are being taken by the NFL to monitor adverse events that may be associated with ephedrine or other dietary supplements and what steps are being taken to educate athletes about the potential dangers of these products. Please provide me with answers to the following questions:

1. Are you aware of adverse events among professional football players that may be associated with dietary supplement use? If so, please describe the events and the supplements involved.
2. What kind of surveillance do you conduct to identify adverse events relating to dietary supplement use?
3. Is it your policy to report adverse events associated with dietary supplement use to the FDA or to require team doctors to report these events? If so, how many have you reported? If not, why not?
4. What steps have you taken to educate athletes and coaches about the potential dangers of certain supplements?

Please provide the requested information by September 5, 2001. If you have any questions, call Sarah Despres of my staff at (202) 225-5420.

Sincerely,


Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member

cc: The Honorable Dan Burton

⁶ *NCAA Study of Substance Use-Habits of College Student-Athletes*. www.ncaa.org (June 2001).