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ONE HUNDRED TENTH CONGRESS

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Energy and Commerce
Washington, DC 20515-6115

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April 15, 2008

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GREGG A. ROTHSCCHILD, CHIEF COUNSEL

Michael J. Klag, M.D., M.P.H.
Dean
Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health
615 N. Wolfe Street, W1041
Baltimore, MD 21205

Dear Dr. Klag:

Under Rules X and XI of the Rules of the U.S. House of Representatives, the Committee on Energy and Commerce and its Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations are investigating the restriction of scientific inquiry in the Population Information Online (POPLINE) database.

I understand that POPLINE, the world's largest database on reproductive health, is maintained by the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health's Center for Communication Programs. It is funded by the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). As reported in your April 4, 2008, statement regarding the POPLINE incident, USAID "found two items in the database related to abortion that did not fit POPLINE criteria. The agency then made an inquiry to POPLINE administrators. Following this inquiry, the POPLINE administrators at the Center for Communication Programs made the decision to restrict abortion as a search term."

According to media reports, the decision to make "abortion" a "stop word" was entirely that of the POPLINE administrators and not a decision requested or made by USAID. I am concerned that the restriction of certain search terms in the POPLINE database is an ideological decision, and not in line with the spirit of free scientific inquiry intended by the creation of such a database. In addition, I am concerned that such a complete restriction was mandated after only two specific items were identified as questionable by POPLINE's funding agency.

Therefore, you are asked to provide the following to the Committee:

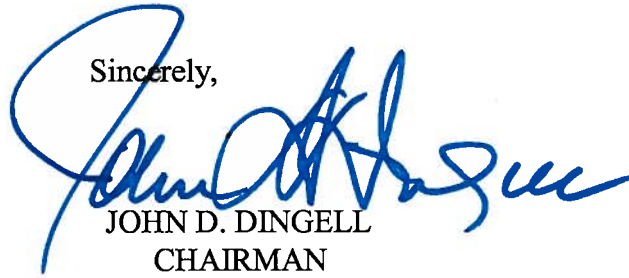
1. All records relating to the decision to make the term "abortion" a "stop word" in the POPLINE database;
2. All records of communications between POPLINE administrators and Gloria Won, a librarian at the University of California, San Francisco Medical Center;
3. All records relating to the awarding of the POPLINE database to Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health including the final contract and fees earned by Johns Hopkins;
4. All records of communications between Johns Hopkins and the U.S. Agency for International Development related to the POPLINE database;
5. Please explain the "POPLINE criteria" mentioned in your statement of April 4, 2008;
6. Please indicate in writing the "two items" which USAID officials identified to POPLINE administrators as supporting "abortion advocacy";
7. A written explanation as to why the identification of two items related to abortion advocacy resulted in the complete designation of "abortion" as a "stop word";
8. Please identify the exact date when the term "abortion" was designated as a "stop word";
9. Please identify the individual(s) who made the decision to designate "abortion" as a "stop word"; and
10. Please identify any other terms that USAID officials or POPLINE administrators designated as "stop words" for searches.

Please deliver copies of the requested records to the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations of the Committee on Energy and Commerce, Room 316, Ford House Office Building, by no later than two weeks from the date of this letter. Please note that for the purpose of responding to this request, the terms "record" and "relating" should be interpreted in accordance with the attachment to this letter. After review of the records, may be required additional records and/or staff interviews with Johns Hopkins officials.

Thank you for your prompt attention to this matter. If you have any questions about this request, please have your staff contact John F. Sopko or Paul Jung with the Committee staff at (202) 226-2424.

Michael J. Klag, M.D., M.P.H.
Page 3

Sincerely,



JOHN D. DINGELL
CHAIRMAN

Attachment

cc: The Honorable Bart Stupak, Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

The Honorable Joe Barton, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Commerce

The Honorable John Shimkus, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations

ATTACHMENT

1. The term "records" is to be construed in the broadest sense and shall mean any written or graphic material, however produced or reproduced, of any kind or description, consisting of the original and any non-identical copy (whether different from the original because of notes made on or attached to such copy or otherwise) and drafts and both sides thereof, whether printed or recorded electronically or magnetically or stored in any type of data bank, including, but not limited to, the following: correspondence, memoranda, records, summaries of personal conversations or interviews, minutes or records of meetings or conferences, opinions or reports of consultants, projections, statistical statements, drafts, contracts, agreements, purchase orders, invoices, confirmations, telegraphs, telexes, agendas, books, notes, pamphlets, periodicals, reports, studies, evaluations, opinions, logs, diaries, desk calendars, appointment books, tape recordings, video recordings, e-mails, voice mails, computer tapes, or other computer stored matter, magnetic tapes, microfilm, microfiche, punch cards, all other records kept by electronic, photographic, or mechanical means, charts, photographs, notebooks, drawings, plans, inter-office communications, intra-office and intra-departmental communications, transcripts, checks and canceled checks, bank statements, ledgers, books, records or statements of accounts, and papers and things similar to any of the foregoing, however denominated.
2. The terms "relating," or "relate" as to any given subject means anything that constitutes, contains, embodies, identifies, deals with, or is in any manner whatsoever pertinent to that subject, including but not limited to records concerning the preparation of other records.