

# Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 6, 2007

The Honorable John Agwunobi  
Assistant Secretary for Health  
Department of Health and Human Services  
Hubert H. Humphrey Bldg.  
200 Independence Avenue, SW  
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Assistant Secretary Agwunobi:

We want to thank you for taking the time last week to testify at the Oversight and Government Reform Subcommittee on Government Management hearing entitled "9/11 Health Effects: Federal Monitoring and Treatment of Residents and Responders." While we appreciate the information you provided, your testimony and answers raised concerns that the Administration still does not have a comprehensive plan to medically monitor all those exposed to the toxins of Ground Zero and treat those who became sick as a result. We urge you to, without delay, detail a plan for providing medical monitoring and treatment for all those impacted by exposure to the hazards related to 9/11.

After years of urging from the New York-area Congressional delegation, we were pleased that the Administration heeded our calls and included \$25 million for 9/11 health issues in the President's Fiscal Year 2008 budget. At that time, Administration officials told us that this funding was a "placeholder," or down payment, until the government's WTC Task Force finalized its plan on how much additional funding would be needed. We were assured the plan would be completed by the end of February.

However, your testimony appeared to contradict these assurances, indicating a formal plan would not be publicly released for Congress and the American people to review. Instead, it is our understanding based on your testimony that the Task Force will offer only internal recommendations for the Secretary of Health and Human Services. In addition, with the February deadline now passed, it remains unclear to us when, and if, the WTC Task Force intends to complete those recommendations.

We were surprised to learn in your testimony that these internal recommendations would not consider the needs of the hundreds of thousands of area residents, workers, and school children who breathed Ground Zero's toxic air over extended periods of time. While we understand the challenge of identifying and assessing costs for non-responder populations, we strongly oppose the decision to exclude them from consideration. Indeed, we believe the Mayor's Task Force provides more than sufficient basis and data for determining the needs of these individuals.

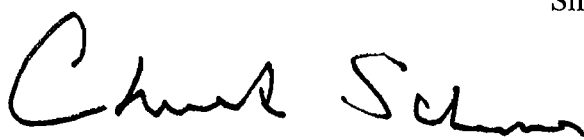
While we understand that no decisions have been made about how to continue the federal medical monitoring and treatment programs into the future, we are very concerned that the Department may be seriously considering replacing funding for the current Centers of Excellence and coordinated data center with a new program that would likely jeopardize the ability to effectively monitor, diagnose, treat and track 9/11 related illnesses. All of the experts from the second panel at Wednesday's hearing, including the leading doctors who have been dealing with this issue since its inception and New York City Deputy Mayors Skyler and Gibbs, testified that maintaining and increasing funding for the Centers for Excellence is critical in dealing with the unique medical conditions and unusual exposures that we are facing.

We all want to ensure that the funding is used quickly and efficiently to provide treatment and services to the people in need. However, dismantling current systems of care will limit access to the established clinical care and expertise of the Centers of Excellence. In fact, doing so could significantly hamper the continuation of research essential to diagnosing and treating sick 9-11 responders, area residents, workers and school children. This research not only enhances the quality of care, but has greater potential to lead to ways of dealing with 9-11 illnesses in a more efficient and less costly manner.

There must be a system of data collection and a standard level of care for everyone involved in the 9-11 health crisis. The heroes of 9/11 deserve no less. As the Department moves forward in its work, we hope that it is driven by this belief and recognize the best way to achieve the necessary level of care must involve continued funding for the Centers of Excellence and programs that are proven in their ability to deliver care to people in need.

We again urge you and the Department to produce a plan that will provide medical monitoring for all those exposed and treatment for all those who are sick. To that end, we would like to meet with you as soon as possible to discuss this important issue.

Sincerely,



**CHARLES E. SCHUMER**  
United States Senator



**HILLARY RODHAM CLINTON**  
United States Senator



**CAROLYN B. MALONEY**  
Member of Congress



**VITO FOSSELLA**  
Member of Congress



**JERROLD NADLER**  
Member of Congress



**EDOLPHUS TOWNS**  
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**CHRISTOPHER SHAYS**  
Member of Congress