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GOVERNMENT REFORM MEMBERS INVOKE “SEVEN MEMBER RULE” TO DEMAND INFORMATION FROM BUSH ADMINISTRATION

WASHINGTON, DC — More than a dozen members of the Government Reform Committee sent letters today to two Cabinet Secretaries demanding the release of important information about health and energy policies. The letters were sent under the authority of the “Seven Member Rule,” a rarely used federal statute that requires executive agencies to “submit any information . . . relating to any matter within the jurisdiction of the committee” when requested by at least seven members of the Government Reform Committee.

“We are taking this unusual step because the Administration’s obsession with secrecy has shut down the flow of information to Congress,” said Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Ranking Minority Member of the Government Reform Committee. “Members of Congress have a right to information. Our government is based on a system of checks and balances, and oversight is a critical part of that system.”

In one letter, the members wrote to HHS Secretary Thompson insisting upon responses to a long series of unanswered letters about political interference with science at HHS. The unanswered letters — written over the course of 15 months — sought information about the removal of scientific information from HHS websites, punitive audits of sex education programs, and the development of a “hit list” of more than 150 NIH grantees who study HIV/AIDS and sexual behavior.

The members also wrote to Energy Secretary Spencer Abraham demanding information regarding reports that the Department of Energy worked with industry groups to plan a “lobbying blitz” in support of the energy bill. This letter responds to a January 6 letter from the Department that denied the request of Reps. Waxman and Dingell for information about contacts between DOE officials and energy lobbyists.

Both “seven member” letters are available at: www.house.gov/reform/min.