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ONE HUNDRED EIGHTH CONGRESS

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Congress of the United States
House of Representatives

COMMITTEE ON GOVERNMENT REFORM
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February 27, 2003

The Honorable Tommy G. Thompson
Secretary of Health and Human Services
Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Mr. Secretary:

I am writing to bring to your attention a report I released today entitled "Maternal and Child Health Policy and Tobacco." This report documents that, despite voluminous evidence that tobacco use by pregnant women and parents is a major cause of disability and death among U.S. children, the Title V programs run by HHS generally lack performance measures related to tobacco use by pregnant women and parents. As a result, states are rarely held to even a minimal standard for smoking cessation.

These performance measures can be improved. It is my understanding that the national performance measures in the Title V Block Grant program are expiring in April 2003. This creates an opportunity for you to work with the Office of Management and Budget to add performance measures on smoking cessation, one of medicine's most life-saving and cost-effective interventions.

You may also want to revisit the question of whether the Title V program should have a national performance measure related to teenage smoking, a topic not covered in the attached report. Only seven states currently have such measures.

I am aware of your and your wife's personal interest in smoking cessation. The Wisconsin Women's Health Foundation, which your wife founded, sponsors an innovative pilot program called First Breath. This initiative provides pregnant women with smoking cessation services at 15 sites across Wisconsin. Such resources are exactly what all of the tobacco-addicted parents and pregnant women in this country deserve.

The opportunity to address this problem is close at hand. Last week, the Interagency Committee on Smoking and Health forwarded to you the recommendations of the Cessation

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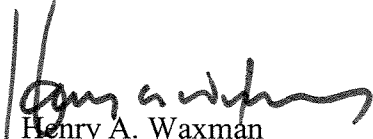
Subcommittee. The Subcommittee has called for a bold national smoking cessation campaign. Its recommendations include the development of a national quit line, the funding of an extensive media campaign, the assurance that all individuals with federally financed health insurance have access to smoking cessation services, and the imposition of a \$2.00 per pack Federal Excise tax to fund cessation efforts.

I am committed to supporting a major national commitment to smoking cessation, and I urge you to work with me to develop the additional legislation needed for this to happen. I particularly urge you to reconsider your opposition, which you publicly stated yesterday, to the increase in cigarette taxes proposed by the Subcommittee. Higher taxes are one of the most successful and proven strategies for reducing smoking rates.

I also request your views on possible changes to the performance measures in the Title V program and on all of the recommendations of the Cessation Subcommittee. I would appreciate a reply by March 10, 2003.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Ranking Minority Member