

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

February 9, 2006

The Honorable Mike Leavitt
Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

As you may know, the XVI International AIDS Conference is scheduled for August 13- 18, 2006 in Toronto, Canada. As in previous years, we assume as the largest funder of HIV/AIDS efforts in that the world, that the U.S. federal government will be represented at this event.

In the past, HHS came under criticism for the excessive number of people sent to and the amount of money spent on this single conference. In 2002, HHS spent \$3.6 million and sent 236 persons to the AIDS conference in Barcelona. In 2004, the Department sent 140 persons and spent \$500,000 on the conference in Bangkok. While this conference may serve as a useful gathering for some, its value has been questioned in recent years. The *New York Times*, in fact, noted in 2004 that "this Bangkok gathering is witnessing the worst science ever presented at an AIDS meeting. Nearly half the scientific presentations expected simply failed to materialize, leaving bare white walls where there were supposed to be thousands of bits of useful data. To be blunt, top H.I.V. laboratory researchers simply don't come to the international gathering anymore, finding it irrelevant."

We certainly hope the 2006 conference proves more valuable in our fight against HIV/AIDS. We also believe that with 95 percent of the 40 million people living with HIV worldwide still without access to AIDS treatment, our priority should be to help these individuals and their families first and only then consider funding for other activities, such as conferences. Therefore, we hope that the Department will carefully scrutinize the amount spent on this conference and limit the number of participants sent at the cost of the Department. Because the conference website, www.AIDS2006.org, will feature webcasts, full abstract texts, downloadable presentation slides and transcripts of selected sessions, many who work in the AIDS field who may be interested in the conference topics can actually gain access without actually traveling to conference.

Could you please provide the following:

- (1) The total number of conference participants being supported by HHS, including government employees and others being sponsored to attend the event by the Department;
- (2) The total amount being spent on this conference, specifically including the amount for travel, registration, lodging and direct conference support.

We commend the President and his Administration's continued leadership in the global efforts to address HIV/AIDS. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Yours very truly,

Scott Garrett

Mark Souder

Joseph Pitts

Steve King

John Klein

V. Codd Abin

Chi-Chi

Tom Cole

Lynne Beale