

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

March 28, 2008

The Honorable Michael Leavitt
Secretary
United States Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt:

We are writing to follow up on your agreement to meet with New York delegation, when asked by Congressman Eliot Engel, in the February 28 budget hearing before the House Energy and Commerce Committee. We appreciate your willingness to meet with the delegation and wish to schedule this meeting quickly. So far, staff contacts between Congressman Engel's office and your office have not resulted in a meeting date.

As you know, the NY delegation was deeply disappointed to learn that President Bush's Fiscal Year 2009 budget proposal includes a 77% funding cut for 9/11 health care programs, from \$108 million appropriated for FY '08 to \$25 million for FY '09. This is in direct contradiction to President Bush's spokesman's claims that the budget "will reflect his continued commitment to World Trade Center workers."

Further, you may recall that the President's FY 2008 budget for the very first time included \$25 million for 9/11 health programs --even though the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) estimated that the programs would need more than \$200 million to cover their operating costs for that year. At the time the President's FY '08 budget was released, the Office of Management and Budget told Members of Congress that, if needed, additional 9/11 health funding would be added to the FY '08 budget. However, the President made no further funding requests that year.

We would also like to discuss in more detail some questions we posed at the hearing. These questions are as follows: the Presidents proposed budget only provides \$25 million dollars for 9/11 health programs and actually proposes to cut back on services to residents and school children affected by the toxins at ground zero. Can you tell us why the federal government is dismissive about the needs of the residents and school children, etc? Can you assure us that you think the residents and school children exposed to the toxins at ground zero do not need medical monitoring and treatment? Dr. John Agwunobi, promised a report on the data collected for the financial and health information needs of the WTC program, but we have never seen the report, what happened?

Last September, the NY delegation, led by Representatives Maloney, Nadler and Fossella introduced H.R. 3543, the James Zadroga 9/11 Health and Compensation Act. The bipartisan Maloney-Nadler-Fossella legislation, which is strongly supported by 73 bipartisan cosponsors and the New

York State AFL-CIO, would ensure that everyone exposed to the toxins of Ground Zero has a right to be medically monitored and anyone who is sick as a result has a right to treatment; expand care to the whole exposed community, including residents, area workers and students, and to the thousands of people who came from across the country to respond to the 9/11 attacks; provide compensation for economic damages and losses by reopening the 9/11 Victim Compensation Fund; and build on the expertise of the Centers of Excellence (currently at the FDNY, Mt. Sinai Hospital, Bellevue Hospital, Queens College, SUNY Stony Brook, and the University of Medicine and Dentistry of New Jersey), which are providing high-quality health care to thousands of responders.


As you know, many of us in the New York Delegation have sent several requests over the past year to meet with you regarding 9-11 health issues. We would like to meet with you immediately to discuss H.R. 3543, as well as other ways you can support 9-11 health care programs in the remaining months of the Bush Administration.

We look forward to your timely response.

Sincerely,


Eliot L. Engel
Member of Congress


Vito Fossella
Member of Congress


Edolphus Towns
Member of Congress