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April 28, 2009

Secretary Kathleen Sebelius
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

I appreciate the work the Department of Health and Human Services is doing to ensure our nation is prepared against the very real threat posed by the current outbreak of swine flu and the threat of a pandemic influenza. Rest assured I will continue my efforts to ensure that your Department's needs are met so we can address this critical national need, and continue to make this inevitable threat a high priority.

I am very concerned, however, by reports that the Department of Health and Human Services has approximately \$1.3 billion in unspent funds for the implementation of the National Strategy for Pandemic Influenza (NSPI).

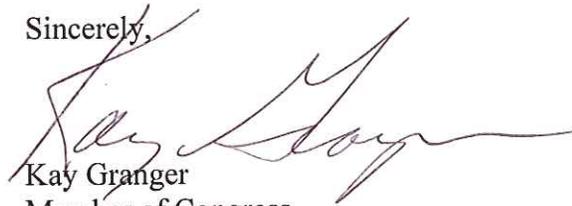
I am particularly concerned that this large unobligated balance remains after I wrote to and spoke with Secretary Leavitt back in 2007 about the importance of acting expeditiously to complete the stockpile with existing antivirals that have shown to be effective, and then work to develop the next generation of advance antivirals. In our conversation, Secretary Leavitt told me that he didn't intend to use the unobligated funds. As I said at the time, I found that answer very disturbing. Given the outbreak of swine flu currently facing our country and the world, I am even more disturbed that your Department is not working with the states to make up the shortfall in their stockpiles, which currently stands at about 8 million courses. In addition, now that 11 million courses have been shipped out to the states, the courses purchased by the federal government will need to be replenished in order to get the stockpile back up to 50 million courses of antivirals. Completing and maintaining the stockpile of enough antiviral drugs for 25 percent of the population is a critical component of the NSPI and will be our nation's first line of defense at the outset of any future pandemic influenza here in the United States.

Many experts have said that targeted antiviral prophylaxis of flu case contacts could successfully contain pandemic influenza. Purchasing additional antivirals with some of the \$1.3 billion in unobligated funds will help with the containment of any large pandemic flu breakout – whether it is swine flu, bird flu, or some new strain of flu.

While we all hope that the current cases of swine flu can be contained, influenza is unpredictable and we need to be prepared if the disease spreads to other cities and states. Given that your Department has \$1.3 billion in unobligated funds for pandemic preparedness, I am concerned that any additional funding Congress may provide through a supplemental appropriations bill or other means will remain unspent.

I respectfully request that you act expeditiously to replenish the stockpile with existing antivirals that have shown to be effective, work with the states to make up the shortfalls in their stockpiles, and purchase additional antivirals for prophylaxis use for health care workers and first responders. I am aware that the Department has published guidance on antiviral drug use during an influenza pandemic and I would strongly encourage the implementation of this plan. In addition, more work needs to be done to develop the next generation of advance antivirals, which could take five years or more to develop. Please provide me with your specific plans, including timeframe, for accomplishing these tasks. I look forward to your prompt reply.

Sincerely,



Kay Granger
Member of Congress

cc: Peter Orzag, OMB
Richard Besser, Acting Director Centers for Disease Control and Prevention
Craig Vanderwagen, Assistant Secretary for Preparedness and Response Rear Admiral