

October 17, 2005

The Honorable Joe Barton
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Barton:

I am writing to request that the Energy and Commerce Committee hold public hearings with Health and Human Services Secretary Leavitt and other public health experts to discuss plans to prevent and respond to an outbreak of avian flu. I understand that the Subcommittee on Health held a hearing in May on the threat of and planning for an avian flu pandemic. A hearing of the full Committee, informed by the lessons of the Federal response to Hurricane Katrina, would be critical to ensuring that the administration's forthcoming plan is effective. As you know, Secretary Leavitt recently announced that the administration soon would put forth a plan to encourage development of a more robust domestic flu vaccine industry, including elements that would promote an expansion of U.S. manufacturing capacity. This plan reportedly will cost between \$6 billion and \$10 billion. I urge the Energy and Commerce Committee to conduct close oversight of the administration's plans, beginning with public hearings to thoroughly examine them.

An avian flu outbreak could have devastating public health and security consequences – including millions of deaths - and we must ensure that the administration's plan will be effective to combat the emergence and spread of the H5N1 avian flu strain and other deadly strains. An effective response to an outbreak would require Federal and state government coordination, rapid public health and emergency medical response, and widespread efforts to preserve public order. As evidenced by the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, there are major deficiencies in our government's ability to perform these vital functions.

I encourage the Committee to promptly hold oversight hearings, and I look forward to your response.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Edward J. Markey

cc.

The Honorable John D. Dingell
Ranking Member
Energy and Commerce Committee
H2-564
Washington, DC 20515