

For Immediate Release:

Today Rep. Henry A. Waxman announced his plans to introduce legislation to protect the Surgeon General from political interference. On Tuesday, the Oversight Committee held a hearing at which three former Surgeons General testified regarding the damage the political interference has done to the ability of the Surgeon General to speak openly and honestly with the American public about threats to public health.

“What we learned at this hearing is that the Office of the Surgeon General is in crisis,” said Rep. Waxman. “Political interference is compromising the independence of the Office. On key public health issues the Surgeon General has been muzzled. This problem will not solve itself.”

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At the hearing, former Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona testified that the job of Surgeon General is to be the doctor of the nation — not the doctor of a political party. Dr. Carmona told the Committee that he was astounded by the degree of partisanship and political manipulation he experienced. And he described how “anything that doesn’t fit into the political appointees’ ideological, theological, or political agenda is ignored, marginalized, or simply buried.”

Dr. Carmona, along with former Surgeon General C. Everett Koop and former Surgeon General David Satcher, made a number of recommendations for legislative changes that would protect the Office of the Surgeon General from political interference. For example, Dr. Koop suggested that Congress appropriate funding directly to the Office of Surgeon General so that the Surgeon General has the staffing and funding necessary to do its work.

“I plan to build on these recommendations, consult with outside experts, and work closely with a number of my colleagues in the House and Senate who have indicated a great interest in legislation to address this problem.” said Rep. Waxman.

Rep. Waxman is the Chairman of the House Oversight and Government Reform Committee and a senior member of the House Energy and Commerce Committee.