

For Immediate Release
Tuesday, January 12, 2010

Grassley says paid health care advocates should disclose federal contracts before being allowed to testify

Senator responds to reports that MIT's Professor Gruber was paid \$400,000 by HHS

WASHINGTON – Senator Chuck Grassley today asked the Secretary of Health and Human Services to require that individuals under contract with the department disclose that financial relationship before testifying to Congress and to provide a list of those who have been contracted within the last year to assist the administration with health care reform legislation.

“When an academic leader comes before Congress to advocate a position, Congress should have confidence that he or she is independent and not being paid to assist the administration,” Grassley said in a letter to Secretary Kathleen Sebelius.

Grassley made his request after reports revealed that a high-profile advocate for certain health care reform policies was paid nearly \$400,000 by the Department of Health and Human Services. Jonathan Gruber, a professor at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, testified in 2009 before the two Senate committees responsible for health care legislation. He has been quoted in numerous reports about the health care debate during the last year, identifying himself only as an MIT professor, rather than as a paid advocate.

“It really taints everything this particular advocate has said to learn after the fact that he was being paid to say it and the fact that he was being paid was kept secret,” Grassley said.

Yesterday, Senator Mike Enzi asked for information about Gruber's relationship with the Department of Health and Human Services. Enzi is Ranking Member of the Committee on Health, Education, Labor, and Pensions. Grassley is Ranking Member of the Senate Committee on Finance.

The text of Grassley's letter to Sebelius follows here.

January 12, 2010

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

Dear Secretary Sebelius:

As the senior senator from Iowa and Ranking Member of the United States Committee on Finance (Committee), I have a duty to conduct oversight of the executive branch, including the activities of the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS or the Department). This duty

includes monitoring HHS activities and conducting oversight to ensure that taxpayer dollars are used appropriately.

I write concerning Massachusetts Institute of Technology professor Jonathan Gruber's relationships with HHS. Recent reports state that Professor Gruber received nearly \$400,000 from HHS in exchange for his providing assistance in evaluating Congress's various health care reform proposals. During this same time, he was active in promoting and defending the Administration's preferred health care policies both before Congress and in the media. This includes Dr. Gruber's participation in the Committee's May 12, 2009, Roundtable Discussion entitled "Financing Comprehensive Health Care Reform." On occasions such as this one, it appears that Professor Gruber advanced the Administration's agenda without disclosing the fact that he was receiving federal remuneration.

For years, I have advocated for transparency in the operation of government and in the use of taxpayer dollars. While it is questionable for Professor Gruber to advocate Administration positions in the media without disclosing his financial ties to the Administration, I am especially concerned by his advocacy before the United States Congress. When an academic leader comes before Congress to advocate a position, Congress should have confidence that he or she is independent and not being paid to assist the Administration. In this case, it appears that neither Professor Gruber nor the Department found it worth informing Congress of his substantial ties in advance of, or any time after, his testimony.

Senator Mike Enzi wrote to you yesterday requesting information concerning Professor Gruber's relationship with the Department. Today, I write to ask that you require any individuals under contract with your Department to disclose that fact publicly to the Committee prior to any testimony before Congress. I also request that you provide a full list of individuals who are currently under contract, or have been under contract at any point within the past year, to assist the Department in any aspect of the health care reform process.

As I am sure you will agree, this is the clearest way of ensuring full transparency and preventing future questions about taxpayer funds and those advocating positions before Congress. If the health care debate has shown us anything, it is that our government can greatly benefit from more openness and transparency.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. I request that your agency provide a response by no later than February 5, 2010.

Sincerely,
Charles E. Grassley
United States Senator
Ranking Member of the Committee on Finance