

# Letter to the Secretary: September 15-17, 2010, Amana, Iowa

October 27, 2010

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

Dear Secretary Sebelius,

I would like to share with you highlights of the recent meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services from September 15-17, 2010 in Amana, Iowa. This meeting, my first as Chair, was the second of the two yearly field meetings of the Committee. It provided an opportunity for members to speak with local rural health and human services experts and will inform the annual Report we prepare for you.

As a follow-up to the June meeting in South Carolina, the Committee conducted this meeting in order to gather further information for its 2011 report that will focus on: childhood obesity in rural communities, rural early childhood development place-based initiatives, and the rural implications of accountable care organizations and payment bundling.

The Childhood Obesity in Rural Communities Subcommittee visited Wapello Elementary School where they observed the Pick A Better Snack program in action. This school-based program encourages children in the community of Wapello to make healthy decisions about food. The Rural Early Childhood Development Place-Based Initiatives Subcommittee visited the small town of Toledo in Tama County where they heard from a panel of health and human services professionals who are working toward a place-based model in their community. The Rural Implications of Accountable Care Organizations and Payment Bundling Subcommittee traveled to Grinnell Regional Medical Center, where they heard from providers, employers, and insurers who will be affected by payment reform.

As we plan for 2011, the Committee recognizes that the Affordable Care Act presents a unique opportunity for us serve as a critical link between HHS and rural communities. While many of the provisions hold great promise for our rural constituents, we know there are many important policy decisions to be made and we want to make sure that rural voices are kept in mind. The Committee feels that the annual reports have served the Department well, but given the

implementation time frames of the ACA, in 2011 we are planning to report to you in a series of short-turnaround white papers so that you have the benefit of rural views on key provisions as you review the Department's proposals.

The Committee and I continue to be concerned about access to and affordability of healthcare in rural communities. At our February meeting at the St. Regis Hotel in Washington, DC from February 23-25, 2011 we will be selecting the first set of ACA provisions that we will comment on. We hope that you or one of your senior staff will be able to join us for the meeting and aid us in identifying those provisions that would best benefit from our counsel.

If you believe it would be more helpful for the Committee to have a more aggressive timetable for identifying those provisions of the ACA that would best benefit from our counsel, please advise. We can accelerate our timeline for doing so. Also, if there are specific provisions which you would seek our input, please advise and we will move those to the top of the list. Just have your staff let us know

We look forward to hearing from you. Thank you again for your leadership, your support of this Committee, and your support of rural America.

Sincerely,

Ronnie Musgrove  
Chair