

Letter to the Secretary: September 12-14, 2004, Tupelo, Mississippi

October 8, 2004

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

Dear Secretary Thompson,

I wanted to share with you the findings from the most recent meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services on September 12-14th, 2004 in Tupelo, Mississippi. The Committee is continuing work on its 2005 report and the opportunity to do site visits and meet with local health care and human service providers is essential to the development of the report. In Tupelo, the Committee also heard from several key Mississippi representatives during the meeting. Dr. Edward Hill, incoming President of the American Medical Association and a local practitioner in Tupelo, shared with the Committee his interest in promoting comprehensive school health education in the schools. Dr. Hill also discussed with the Committee his early work in the Delta region delivering obstetrical care through an interdisciplinary team-based approach that has important relevance for rural underserved communities. The Committee also heard testimony from Dr. Warren Jones, head of the Mississippi Medicaid program, on the challenges his State faces in controlling prescription drug costs and improving continuity of care among the Medicaid population.

The 2005 report focuses on four important issues. The first is the value of promoting collaboration in rural communities. The second is how to improve administration of the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) in rural communities. The third is access to obstetrical services in rural communities and the fourth is the impact of obesity in rural communities. This meeting in the field afforded the Committee an opportunity to focus on each of these issues at the rural community level, which will greatly inform the work on these chapters. In the report, we will share with you our findings from visits in Tupelo and the surrounding communities of West Point, Mississippi and Aberdeen, Mississippi.

The meeting also provided an opportunity to learn about how a larger rural town such as Tupelo can play a critical role in a region. In this case, Tupelo serves as a regional hub for 16 surrounding counties. In that role, the city works with its surrounding communities and the Commission on the Future of Northeast Mississippi in a collaborative effort to improve service delivery across the health and human service sectors. We hope to examine this model further in the 2005 report.

We will continue work on the report through the next few months and we plan to approve it at our winter meeting March 20th, 2005. Thank you for your support of rural issues during your tenure and we look forward to working with your successor.

Sincerely,

David M. Beasley
Chair