

Letter to the Secretary: June 12-14, 2005, Johnson City, Tennessee

July 8, 2005

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

Dear Secretary Leavitt,

I wanted to share with you the highlights from the most recent meeting of the National Advisory Committee on Rural Health and Human Services in Johnson City, Tennessee June 12-14, 2005. As you know, at this time of year the Committee is in the early stages of developing the various chapters for its annual report.

The 2006 report focuses on three key issues for rural communities. In concert with your initiative to improve health information technology, the first chapter of the 2006 report will examine health information technology in rural areas. The second chapter will highlight the importance of access to pharmaceuticals and pharmacy services in rural areas. We believe this chapter will be very timely given the prescription drug benefit changes. The third chapter examines the needs of family caregiver support for rural elderly and the particular rural needs of this population.

The recent meeting provided us with an opportunity to better understand all of these issues and how they are represented in rural Tennessee and Virginia towns such as Mountain City and Big Stone Gap. The Committee used this meeting to gather topic information and to meet with State officials, health and human service providers, and university faculty and staff across rural northeast Tennessee and southwest Virginia.

During the coming months, the Committee will continue to gather data on all of these issues and begin formally drafting chapters for review at the September 18-20, 2005 meeting in Wilson, Wyoming. This meeting will provide another opportunity to examine the 2006 report topics in light of how they affect rural and frontier communities in western Wyoming.

We are excited about the 2006 report and the opportunity to provide the Department with some analysis of these important rural issues and a number of recommendations on how to better address these challenges. It is our hope that you can join us for the September meeting. Thank you again for your support of this Committee and your support of Rural America.

Sincerely,

David M. Beasley
Chair