Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

July 9, 2009

The Honorable Henry Waxman
Chairman
House Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Frank Pallone
Chairman
House Committee on Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Health
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Charles Rangel
Chairman
House Committee on Ways and Means
1105 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Pete Stark
Chairman
House Committee on Ways and Means
Subcommittee on Heath
1105 Longworth House Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Waxman, Chairman Rangel, Chairman Pallone and Chairman Stark:

We have noted with interest President Obama's and the AARP's support of Senate Finance Committee Chairman Baucus' announcement that he plans to include language in his Committee's health reform legislation that will provide a 50 percent discount to most Medicare beneficiaries on brand-name medicines when purchased in the coverage gap, or "doughnut hole."

Like the President, we believe that as we discuss providing coverage for the uninsured, it is also critical that we make needed improvements in current coverage for Medicare beneficiaries. Specifically, we must address their high out-of-pocket drug costs in the Part D doughnut hole. Providing relief to seniors in the doughnut hole has been a priority for Democrats since enactment of the Part D drug benefit, because research has shown that this gap in coverage often forces them to go without needed medicines and results in worse health outcomes.

Your efforts to remove this onerous burden on Medicare beneficiaries and their families in the recently unveiled health reform legislation discussion draft are to be greatly commended. However, the commitment by President Obama and AARP to support legislation that would provide a 50 percent price reduction is a dramatic step forward in helping fill the doughnut hole. Equally important, it moves us toward our goal of health reform legislation—to make sure all Americans have access to good, affordable health coverage.

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We urge you to substitute the President's proposal in your health reform legislation discussion draft. Not only would it deliver immediate savings to seniors, instead of slowly phasing out the doughnut hole over 10 years, it would not require the federal government to raise additional revenue, as is the case in the draft legislation. This is important because as recently as December 2008 the Congressional Budget Office warned that expansion of drug price controls in Medicare Part D could result in potentially higher premiums for seniors.

We thank you for your diligence in these matters and we look forward to working together on these issues.

Sincerely,

Heath Shuler

Deborah Halvorson

Mike Ross

Donald Payne

Glenn Nye

David Scott

Michael Arcuri

Charles Wilson

John Barrow

Suzanne Kosmas

Jim Himes

Frank Kratovil

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Gerry Connolly

Kendrick Meek

Jason Altmire

Loretta Sanchez

Steve Driehaus

Ann Kirkpatrick

Lincoln Davis

Gary Peters

Christopher Carney

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