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Hinchey Statement On Release of Union of Concerned Scientists' "Voices of Scientists at FDA" Report

Washington, DC -- Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY) today released the following statement regarding the Union of Concerned Scientists' new report, "Voices of Scientists at FDA: Protecting Public Health Depends on Independent Science."

"I commend the Union of Concerned Scientists for conducting this thorough and comprehensive study that has shed light on the serious and widespread problems at the FDA. One of the more disturbing findings of the study is that more than half of the scientists at the FDA said their job satisfaction has decreased over the past few years during President Bush's time in office. Under this president, the FDA has decided to let politics overrule science. We saw it with the Plan B decision, with the way in which Vioxx, Bextra, and other drugs were mismanaged, and in the agency's repeated efforts to preempt state law in order to minimize drug company accountability under former Counsel Daniel Troy. Honest, hard-working scientists at the FDA are being forced to report only part of the facts, or alter their findings in order to advance a political agenda. This is an absolute disgrace and is the exact opposite of how the FDA should be behaving.

"At the heart of many of the FDA's problems is the fact that the agency is too closely aligned with and financially tied to the pharmaceutical and device industries that it is supposed to regulate. The cozy relationship between the FDA and industry has resulted in the agency being dependent upon industry funds for its budget, which has in turn made the FDA beholden to drug company interests. Right now, the FDA has to negotiate with companies as to how it will use those fees and the FDA is powerless when it comes to demanding label changes. We need to separate the financial link between the two entities.

"For far too long the FDA has treated the pharmaceutical industry as a 'client' rather than as a regulated industry. It is time to stop letting the pharmaceutical industry dictate how the FDA does its job. That is why last year I introduced the most comprehensive FDA reform bill in Congress, the FDA Improvement Act, H.R. 2090. If enacted, the FDA Improvement Act would reform the culture at the FDA by cutting off the cozy relationship that exists today between the agency and the drug industry. Too often the FDA has failed the American people and unnecessarily endangered the lives of millions. This bill will help ensure that the American people are protected from harmful drugs and adequately warned of potential side effects associated with others. It would also help FDA's career scientists do the job they want to do -- protect the public through science-based regulations.

"Armed with this new Union of Concerned Scientists report, it is my hope that we can advance the FDA Improvement Act in Congress. When the voices of FDA scientists are heard, it is quite clear that comprehensive reform is needed. We must end the financial link and inappropriately close relationship between the drug industry and the FDA, eliminate conflicts of interest on FDA advisory committees, and vastly improve the agency's post-market drug safety operations. We must return the FDA to a time when science was the only consideration for approving a drug, not politics."

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