



Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service

Gerard M. Farrell
Captain, USN (Ret.)
Executive Director

11 December 2008

The Honorable Barack Obama
President-Elect of the United States of America
P.O. Box 8102
Chicago, Illinois 60680

Dear President-Elect Obama:

The Commissioned Officers Association of the U.S. Public Health Service (COA), representing more than 75% of the active duty officers of the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) Commissioned Corps, extends our most sincere congratulations on your election as 44th President of the United States. The COA wishes you every success as you address the many difficult issues facing our Nation.

Among the most pressing concerns is the restoration of the public health infrastructure and rescue of the public health workforce. The Nation's public health is the most fundamental element of our national security. Preserving and promoting the Nation's public health is essential to our ability to provide and sustain a healthy economy, a strong military, and the very fabric of our society.

Earlier today, you named former Senate Majority Leader Tom Daschle as the next Secretary of Health and Human Services. Secretary-Designate Daschle will benefit immeasurably from the advice and counsel of a Surgeon General who is an experienced, independent, public health professional. The COA urges you to restore the independence and authority of the U.S. Surgeon General by appointing the next Surgeon General from within the career ranks of the uniformed PHS Commissioned Corps.

The Association urges you to heed the advice of former Surgeons General, many Members of Congress, and a host of recent public health studies and reports, when they recommend greater authority and independence for the Office of Surgeon General. Such authority and independence can only be achieved by treating the Office of Surgeon General the same as the chiefs of service of the other Uniformed Services, whose senior uniformed leaders are selected from the career ranks of each individual Service.

The next U.S. Surgeon General must have a keen appreciation of both traditional public health practice and public health emergency preparedness and crisis response operations. Since 1889 the leaders of the Nation's public health workforce have been the officers of the PHS Commissioned Corps. The Corps, in turn, needs a leader of its own who will have the confidence of the Corps, credibility within the ranks as well as the broader public health

community, and demonstrated leadership ability to continue the important and ongoing transformation of the Corps. Indeed, a strong case can be made that the well-documented decline in the Nation's public health infrastructure and workforce correlates directly with the increasing politicization of the Office of Surgeon General and the corresponding erosion of that office and the PHS Commissioned Corps which began in the 1960s.

There are many highly qualified and capable senior Corps officers who could easily step up and into the Office of Surgeon General. Recently retired Corps officers are also available to broaden the selection pool.

The Commissioned Officers Association urges you to truly institute change we can believe in by returning the Office of Surgeon General and the PHS Commissioned Corps to its historic professionalism and accountable leadership role as the premiere guardians of the Nation's public health. Appoint the 18th Surgeon General from within the career ranks of the PHS Commissioned Corps.

Very respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "G. Farrell", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gerard M. Farrell
Captain, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Executive Director

Cc: The Honorable Tom Daschle
The Honorable Edward Kennedy, U.S. Senate
The Honorable Henry Waxman, U.S. House of Representatives