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October 26, 2012

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

The Honorable Cliff Stearns  
Chairman  
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations  
Committee on Energy and Commerce  
2125 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

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

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

Dear Chairman Upton, Chairman Stearns, Chairman Pitts, and Vice Chairman Burgess:

I am writing in further response to your letter of September 20, 2012. In my October 11, 2012 letter, I explained in detail how AARP came to support comprehensive health care reform legislation, including the Affordable Care Act.

In this letter, I will address your questions regarding the views of AARP's members on health care reform. You specifically asked if the AARP Board of Directors was informed of concerns about health care reform expressed by some of our members. I have served on the all volunteer Board for the last six years, which encompassed the entire discussion around the Affordable Care Act, as well as some of the earlier discussions around the need for health care reform. I continue to serve on the Board this year in my current capacity as AARP's volunteer president. Thus, I can answer your question from first-hand experience.

Your letter implies that information about member and non-member opposition to health care reform was hidden from the AARP Board of Directors. Nothing could be further from the truth. In fact, I can assure you that AARP's Board of Directors was kept well-informed about complaints from members and others who opposed health care reform – as well as about support from members and other Americans 50 and over.

Let me start by saying that the idea of measuring support for health care reform simply by looking at the number of phone calls received by AARP is fundamentally flawed. Although calls opposing health care reform outnumbered those in support of reform, common sense will tell you that people are more motivated to complain than to compliment. I am sure you experience that in your own offices. Thus, relying solely on dissatisfied callers is never a good measure of overall public sentiment.

Notably, during the debate over health care reform, more than 1.3 million AARP members and activists registered their support for health care reform by engaging in grassroots advocacy activities such as signing petitions or contacting their Member of Congress, far exceeding the number of complaints we received. We estimate that nearly half of the calls, letters, and emails we received expressing opposition to health care reform came from non-members.

Further, more than 580,000 members participated in over 100 telephone town halls on health care reform while the debate in Washington and across America ensued. The town halls gave our members the opportunity to ask health care experts and policy makers, such as prominent Republican Reps. Eric Cantor, Shelley Moore Capito and Leonard Lance, questions about various reform proposals under consideration – another way in which we gained insights into the views of our members, the problems they faced, and the ways in which health care reform addressed them. And of course, there was scientifically valid polling – done by AARP and other organizations – that probed support for component pieces of the health care legislation, as well as overall impressions of the health care bill.

During our deliberations on whether to support health care reform legislation, and as health care reform legislation moved through Congress, the AARP Board received reports on member and non-member feedback. We were apprised of the number of calls, emails, and letters; how many of those contacts we believed were received from members and non-members and the percentages that opposed and supported health care reform. We were informed of how many members reported to us that they were canceling their membership because of our support for reform. Staff also updated us on trends related to contacts, such as when there were significant increases or decreases in volume or sentiment.

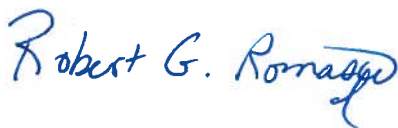
Given the importance of quality health care to all Americans, and especially to those 50+, it is understandable that there was both confusion and differences of opinion about the right way to reform health care. Every member of our Board respects and appreciates the views expressed by each of our members. We, as a Board and as an organization, wish that no member had disagreed with AARP's support of health care reform. However, we also recognize that it is impossible to completely satisfy more than thirty-seven million people on every policy position we take. Our task required us to consider feedback from our members, positive and negative, along with our years of research and polling of the wants and needs of AARP members and other older Americans.

I described the extensive process of setting our health care reform agenda and principles in my October 11, 2012 letter, and will not repeat the extensive research that demonstrates members and other seniors broadly supported the core positions of AARP relating to coverage of preventative care, precluding insurance companies from denying coverage for pre-existing conditions, making insurance affordable and accessible for Americans age 50-64, closing the Medicare Part D "doughnut hole," and improving coverage for long-term care. My 13-page letter demonstrated the careful approach AARP took to developing a consensus for its views based on extensive research and study.

Let me assure you that AARP staff carried out their obligations to the Board thoroughly and consistently. Staff provided us with the timely information we needed to consider member and public feedback on both sides, as well as the extensive policy research AARP had developed over many years. AARP's 22-member volunteer Board of Directors was ultimately responsible for AARP's decision to support health care reform legislation. The Board would never make such an important decision without considering the views of the people we serve. We were fully informed on all relevant issues, including how our members and other 50+ Americans felt about reform.

I hope you find this information useful and that it helps to clarify any misunderstanding around the decision the AARP Board of Directors made to support health care reform.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Robert G. Romasco". The signature is written in a cursive style with a prominent initial "R".

Robert G. Romasco  
President

cc: A. Barry Rand