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Kelley Applauds Congressional Scrutiny Of FDA Outsourcing Plan

Washington, D.C. –The leader of the union representing thousands of FDA employees today applauded increased congressional scrutiny of a Food and Drug Administration (FDA) plan to study the possible contracting out of more than 300 positions to the private sector.

On Friday, Reps. John D. Dingell (D-Mich.) and Bart Stupak (D-Mich.), chairman of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce and chairman of the Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations, respectively, sent a strongly-worded letter to FDA Commissioner Andrew C. von Eschenbach questioning the merits and timing of the contracting out plan. The letter also seeks a detailed description of how the plan was devised and how it will be implemented.

"Your hasty and injudicious plans to 'reorganize' and slash employees will only further undermine the ability of the FDA to accomplish its critical mission," the letter reads.

President Colleen M. Kelley of the National Treasury Employees Union (NTEU) also criticized the haste of the FDA's plan, explaining that the agency should be enhancing its capabilities, not reducing them. "Given the recent crises in our food supply and dangerous imports, it is baffling that the FDA believes that it can better protect the American public by contracting out work to the private sector," Kelley said.

The lawmakers' letter not only seeks more information about the contracting out plan, it also condemns the FDA for failing to wait for recommendations from the President's Import Working Group that is now studying improved ways to increase security over the nation's food and drug supply.

"Only a week ago, the agency was forced to cancel its similarly ill-conceived proposal to shut down more than half of its food-sampling laboratories," the letter states. "It is truly incomprehensible that the FDA would again consider reducing the expertise of the agency at a time when their credibility with the American people is at an all-time low."

Last month, the FDA notified NTEU that it had identified 332 positions as commercial in nature – in eight different FDA organizations – about which it intended to conduct 13 separate studies leading to possible contracting out. Agency officials said the positions to be studied include a variety of technical and administrative jobs in more than 20 cities.

President Kelley questioned whether an accurate accounting of the work performed by the federal employees could be properly achieved in that time. "Without a completely accurate picture of all the work that these employees actually perform, a poor contracting decision could be made and the contractor will not deliver the same services that are currently delivered by in-house personnel," Kelley said.

NTEU is the largest independent federal union, representing 150,000 employees in 31 agencies and departments, including about 5,200 in the FDA.