



Congress of the United States

House of Representatives

Washington, DC 20515

February 10, 2006

The Honorable Andrew C. von Eschenbach, M.D.
Acting Commissioner
Food and Drug Administration
5600 Fishers Lane
Rockville, MD 20856

Dear Dr. von Eschenbach:

As members of the Congressional Spina Bifida Caucus, we are writing to bring to your attention an important public health milestone this month – the ten year anniversary of the Food and Drug Administration’s (FDA) decision to fortify grain products with folic acid.

As you know, the consumption of folic acid helps to reduce and prevent birth defects, including Spina Bifida and other neural tube defects. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) has reported 25% fewer Spina Bifida affected pregnancies since grain fortification began. Moreover, the CDC estimates that up to 70% of neural tube defects, serious birth defects of the brain and spinal cord including anencephaly and Spina Bifida, could be prevented if all women of childbearing age consumed 400 micrograms of folic acid daily, beginning before pregnancy.

Given that our nation now has ten years of experience with folic acid fortification, we are requesting information from you regarding what plans FDA has to evaluate the impact of the current level of folic acid fortification, as well as what the agency might do in the coming year to ensure our nation makes additional gains in the reduction of Spina Bifida and other neural tube defects.

We look forward to receiving an update on what the FDA has been doing on folic acid fortification issues, and learning what your agency will pursue for the coming year on this critical public health issue.

Please know that we are eager to work with you, your agency, and the American Academy of Pediatrics, Families Preventing Birth Defects, the March of Dimes, and the Spina Bifida Association and other stakeholders to ensure our nation takes all the steps necessary to reduce and prevent as many birth defects as possible.

We appreciate your attention to this priority request.

Sincerely,



BART STUPAK
Co-Chair, Spina Bifida Caucus
Member of Congress



CHRISTOPHER H. SMITH
Co-Chair, Spina Bifida Caucus
Member of Congress



DAN BURTON
Member of Congress



SHERROD BROWN
Member of Congress



WILLIAM JEFFERSON
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MICHAEL MCNULTY
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JIM MORAN
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TAMMY BALDWIN
Member of Congress