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## **CHAIRMAN KENNEDY INTRODUCES LEGISLATION TO ENSURE INTEGRITY IN THE OFFICE OF THE SURGEON GENERAL**

WASHINGTON, D.C.—Today, Senator Edward M. Kennedy, Chairman of the United States Senate Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee will introduce legislation that seeks to ensure that politics is not trumped by sound science in the Office of the Surgeon General.

The bill would require a nominee to this office to be drawn from a list of the nation's most eminent physicians prepared by the Institute of Medicine, give the Office of the Surgeon General budgetary independence by allowing the Surgeon General to submit budget requests directly to the public, Congress and to the President, allow the Surgeon General to place original drafts of any speeches, reports or other writings into prohibits political censorship of the Surgeon General's work and requires transparency in identifying any edits to the Surgeon General's work, to be released upon request of Congress and with the assent of the Surgeon General and allows the Surgeon General to hire his or her own staff directly.

Chairman Kennedy said, "The Office of the Surgeon General has become a morass of shameful political manipulation and distortion of science. The Surgeon General must be a person who can be an indisputable respected and trusted voice about the health, wellness and safety. The Surgeon General's message should be able to reach across the divisions that arise in a pluralistic society such as ours to educate, inform and protect all Americans."

A summary of the legislation is below. The bill will be introduced today.

### **THE SURGEON GENERAL INTEGRITY RESTORATION ACT** **Senator Edward M. Kennedy**

#### **Background**

The Surgeon General is America's top doctor. As such, his or her integrity much be beyond reproach, and free from political interference. Sadly, in recent years, the reverse has been true. As revealed by former Surgeon General Carmona's shocking testimony, the Office of the Surgeon General has been the victim of outrageous political manipulation during the Bush Administration. Judgments based on sound science were suppressed or warped for political ends. Speeches were edited and distorted. This kind of political interference with the nation's top doctor cannot be tolerated – particularly at a time when the nation faces critical policy decisions that depend on a clear assessment of the science.

To restore the integrity and the independence of the Office of the Surgeon General, the bill:

- Requires the nominee for this important position to be drawn from a list of the nation's most eminent physicians, prepared by the Institute of Medicine.
- Gives the Office of the Surgeon General budgetary independence by allowing the Surgeon General to submit budget requests directly to the public, Congress and to the President, bypassing manipulation by political appointees in the Department of Health and Human Services.
- Sheds light on any pressure exerted by political appointees to distort scientific findings.
- Allows the Surgeon General to hire his or her own staff directly, without having to undergo

a political litmus test imposed by the Administration.

Forbids any attempt to censor the work of the Surgeon General for political reasons. Any policy dissent by the Administration to the Surgeon General's writings must clearly be labeled as such. Only those edits in which the Surgeon General concurs will be incorporated into a revised report.

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