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Group Calls on Bush, Congress to Expand Power of the Office of Surgeon General

Washington, DC – Trust for America's Health called on President Bush and the Congress to reverse years of decline in the power and resources of the Surgeon General and give the office the leadership role and tools it needs to spearhead federal efforts to safeguard the health of all Americans.

"We are pleased the President has acted to fill two of the leadership vacancies we have in the top four federal agencies responsible for protecting public health," said Lowell Weicker, former U.S. Senator and Governor of Connecticut, and current President of Trust for America's Health (TFAH). "Now the President and the Congress must make the office of the Surgeon General more than just the bully pulpit it is currently."

Leaders for the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) and the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) have still not been named.

"America faces new health threats from possible chemical and biological terrorist attacks – on top of the ongoing crisis of chronic diseases, which account for about 70 percent of all deaths in America, and infectious diseases that also take a terrible toll. We need a Surgeon General who can act as a General not a Corporal," added Weicker.

More than 50 federal offices have some responsibility for ensuring public health. Years of restructuring under Democratic and Republican Administrations has weakened the office of the Surgeon General.

"We need qualified leaders with public health and medical expertise in these offices, and we need to give them the power and resources to lead. The upcoming confirmation process will provide Congress with the opportunity to address this need to strengthen the office of Surgeon General and help these leaders protect us here on the home front," said Weicker.

TFAH and 20 other organizations sent a letter to President Bush in early March urging him to act quickly to nominate qualified individuals to fill the vacancies of four top federal leaders responsible for public health.

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The Trust for America's Health is a national non-profit organization whose mission is to protect the health and safety of all communities, especially those most at risk of environmental and other public health threats. For more information, visit www.healthyamericans.org.