

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

March 10, 2010

The President Barack Obama
The White House
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President,

The purpose of this letter is to request your favorable consideration for issuing a Presidential Proclamation naming the month of May "National Hepatitis Awareness Month," and specifically naming May 19, 2010 as "World Hepatitis Day." There are currently over 5 million Americans with chronic hepatitis B virus (HBV) and chronic hepatitis C virus (HCV) infections, and each year, up to 15,000 Americans die from these diseases. In addition, chronic viral hepatitis is the leading cause of liver cancer, liver transplantation, and death in Americans co-infected with HIV and viral hepatitis. Liver cancer is one of the fastest growing cancers with poor survival rates.

The recently released Institute of Medicine (IOM) report, *Hepatitis and Liver Cancer: A National Strategy for Prevention and Control of Hepatitis B and C*, found that the majority of the American public is uninformed of these epidemics and their own risks. Even for Americans currently infected, approximately 75% with chronic hepatitis C infection and 65% with chronic hepatitis B infection do not know they are infected; leading to poor health outcomes, including inadvertent transmission of the virus and death. Further, America's health providers are often not aware of these diseases, not adequately screening for them in their patients, nor are they sufficiently preventing, managing and referring people into care. A lack of federal leadership and dedication of public resources to the prevention, detection, and management of these diseases has contributed to the low level of knowledge. This is particularly the case in our lowest income minority communities, where there is a disproportionately higher incidence of chronic viral hepatitis cases.

We consider the release of the IOM report an opportune time for you, the President of the United States, to acknowledge not only the domestic, but also the global burden of these diseases to increase public awareness and bolster political will for an improved federal response. We recognize and commend Assistant Secretary of Health Howard Koh for establishing the Viral Hepatitis Interagency Workgroup in response to the IOM report and as a step toward developing a federal programmatic response. The hard work of state and local health departments, community-based organizations, community health centers, and other frontline service providers should be recognized, particularly given the years of scant federal attention and resources. Not of least importance are the millions of Americans who have been impacted by these diseases, including American baby-boomers who are approaching Medicare eligibility and have reported a large number of chronic hepatitis C cases, as well as a critically and disproportionately high number of cases among African American and Asian Americans.

The social and fiscal costs associated with chronic viral hepatitis infections are increasing exponentially. An actuarial study conducted in 2002 estimated total medical expenditures for

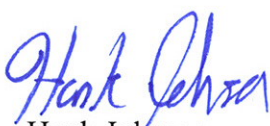
people with HCV at \$15 billion per year. The projected direct and indirect cost of the current hepatitis C epidemic, if left unchecked, is \$85 billion for the years 2010 through 2019. Tragically, almost 30% of HIV patients are co-infected with HCV and 15% with HBV. These individuals are dying of the hepatitis virus infection – not HIV. The number of Americans with hepatitis B or hepatitis C now outnumbers those living with HIV/AIDS by 5 to 1.

Americans living with chronic hepatitis B and C experience stigmatization and a lack of awareness among colleagues, friends and the American public. We do not hear the silent struggles of our constituents living unknowingly with chronic viral hepatitis, dying from these preventable infections, and facing financial hardship to receive the lifesaving medical attention they deserve. It is our hope that with your support we can begin to address these issues, prevent the spread of these infections, and control these epidemics once and for all.

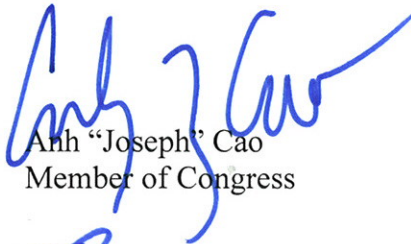
This is a public health issue that has a worldwide impact and is a significant issue in America. Many health organizations are launching special awareness events and activities in May to help educate the American public about these tragic diseases and to urge prevention, testing and treatment. We, therefore, respectfully request a Presidential Proclamation recognizing the month of May as “National Hepatitis Awareness Month” and specifically naming May 19, 2010 as “World Hepatitis Day.” Such a Presidential Proclamation will significantly rally public support to address the health crisis of chronic viral hepatitis in this country and worldwide.

We hope that the attached draft proclamation text will be helpful should you choose to recognize the month of May as “National Hepatitis Awareness Month” and specifically name May 19, 2010 as “World Hepatitis Day.”

Sincerely,



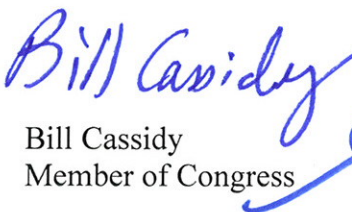
Hank Johnson
Member of Congress



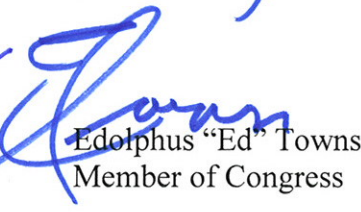
Anh “Joseph” Cao
Member of Congress



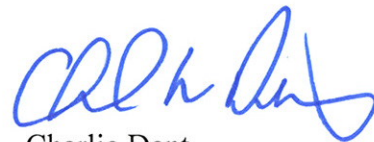
Michael M. Honda
Member of Congress



Bill Cassidy
Member of Congress



Edolphus “Ed” Towns
Member of Congress



Charlie Dent
Member of Congress