Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

June 6, 2006

The Honorable J. Dennis Hastert
Speaker of the House
H232 Capitol
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Speaker:

We are writing to ask that you prohibit smoking in all House buildings. Unless you act, the Capitol Complex will soon be one of the few places in the District of Columbia where the law does not protect employees and visitors from the harmful effects of secondhand smoke.

Effective on April 3, D.C. law prohibited smoking in any workplace or indoor public place.[1] While some businesses will have until January 1, 2007, to comply, most areas will be smoke-free immediately. But the U.S. House of Representatives will not follow the new law. Instead, the House will continue to expose staff and visitors to secondhand smoke, a known human carcinogen.

The harmful effects of secondhand smoke are severe and well-documented. Every year, secondhand smoke causes roughly 3,000 deaths from lung cancer and 35,000 deaths from heart disease.[2] Nonsmokers exposed to secondhand smoke also face an increased risk of many serious health conditions, including asthma, lower respiratory infections, lung cancer, stroke, and heart and respiratory disease.[3] According to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, "there is no known safe level of secondhand smoke exposure." Even short-term exposure may increase a person's risk of heart attack.[4]

Given these risks, banning smoking in indoor workplaces and public areas is the only effective way to protect against the death and disease caused by secondhand smoke. The District of Columbia and hundreds of other states and cities across the country have recognized their responsibility to act and have implemented smoke-free policies. Employees and members of the public who use and visit federal buildings outside the legislative branch also enjoy these protections, thanks to executive order and agency action.

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[1] *Department of Health Functions Clarification Amendment Act of 2006*, D.C. Law 16-90 (Jan. 4, 2006).

[2] Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, Tobacco Information and Prevention Source, *State Smoking Restrictions for Private-Sector Worksites, Restaurants, and Bars – United States, 1998 and 2004* (online at http://www.cdc.gov/tobacco/research_data/legal_policy/mm5426_highlights.htm).

[3] *Id.*

[4] *Id.*

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Yet smoking continues in House buildings, including in the cafeterias of the Ford and Rayburn office buildings, in Members' offices, and in the Speaker's Lounge.

Mr. Speaker, the U.S. House of Representatives should be a leader in protecting the public health, not a haven of risk. We ask that you exercise your leadership to bring House buildings into compliance with local law and with the mandates of public health by ending smoking in all House buildings.

Sincerely,

HENRY A. WAXMAN
Member of Congress

MARTIN T. MEEHAN
Member of Congress

TAMMY BALDWIN
Member of Congress

MICHAEL R. MCNULTY
Member of Congress

SAM FARR
Member of Congress

DORIS O. MATSUI
Member of Congress

STEVEN R. ROTHMAN
Member of Congress

JERROLD NADLER
Member of Congress

JAMES P. MORAN
Member of Congress

GEORGE MILLER
Member of Congress

DIANE E. WATSON
Member of Congress

LOIS CAPPS
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FRANK PALLONE, JR.
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MICHAEL M. HONDA
Member of Congress

LLOYD DOGGETT
Member of Congress

FORTNEY PETE STARK
Member of Congress

ED CASE
Member of Congress

DENNIS J. KUCINICH
Member of Congress

ADAM SMITH
Member of Congress