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MEDICAID COMMISSION NAMED BY SECRETARY LEAVITT LACKS BALANCE

By Leighton Ku and Victoria Wachino

On Friday, July 8, HHS Secretary Mike Leavitt named the members of his new Medicaid Commission, which is designed both to make recommendations by September 2005 on how to cut \$10 billion from Medicaid funding and to make longer-term recommendations regarding Medicaid by December 2006. The membership of the commission appears to be substantially unbalanced. It does not reflect an appropriate and diverse range of views concerning health care policy and the needs of Medicaid beneficiaries.

The voting members of the Commission include:

- a former Republican governor and a former Independent governor (but no governor or other current or former elected official who is a Democrat),
- three political appointees of the Bush Administration (including two current appointees and a former appointee),
- one political appointee of a Republican governor,
- one current and one former state Medicaid director,
- two individuals with strong views on health care issues who come from conservative think tanks,
- one member who previously worked with Secretary Leavitt in Utah,
- one consumer representative, representing people with disabilities, and
- one individual from a think tank that focuses on racial and ethnic disparities.

The Commission's non-voting members include:

- twelve representatives of health care provider organizations,
- one consumer representative, representing people with disabilities,
- one county executive (a Republican), and
- one staff member of the National Conference of State Legislatures.

Absent from the voting members of the commission are people representing the interests of low-income children, families or senior citizens.