As your constituent, I'm writing you because health reform is a very important issue to me. I am glad that the Senate and House have drafted bills aimed at fixing our healthcare system. I believe a major part of our healthcare system that needs to be addressed is health disparities. Healthcare disparities should be a focus of the health reform bill because they represent a failure of the healthcare system to properly treat individuals who do have access. In September 2009, the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies put out a report entitled: "The Economic Burden of Health Inequalities in the United States." The final conclusion made by the report is quoted below:

- "Between 2003 and 2006 the combined costs of health inequalities and premature death in the United States was $1.24 trillion."
- "Eliminating health disparities for minorities would have reduced direct medical care expenditures by $229.4 billion for the years 2003-2006."
- "Between 2003 and 2006, 30.6% of direct medical care expenditures for African Americans, Asians, and Hispanics were excess costs due to health inequalities."
- "Eliminating health inequalities for minorities would have reduced indirect costs associated with illness and premature death by more than one trillion dollars between 2003 and 2006."

From my understanding, both the Senate HELP bill and the House bill contain elements to address healthcare disparities. Both bills attempt to increase access to health care and primary care providers which is only part of the solution to healthcare disparities. I am writing you because there are aspects of both bills that I would like to see incorporated in the final health reform bill that will be signed by President Obama.
They include

- Continue funding of pipeline programs that have been effective in preparing students from disadvantaged backgrounds and underrepresented minorities to enroll in medical school.
- Establish a grant program to support the delivery of evidence-based and community-based prevention and wellness services aimed at reducing health disparities. Train community health workers to promote positive health behaviors in medically underserved communities.
- Reform Graduate Medical Education to increase training of primary care providers. Provide training grants for professionals to be educated about prevention, public health, and cultural competence training for health care professionals.
- Require reporting of quality outcome data on race, ethnicity, gender, geographic location, primary language, and underserved rural and urban populations. Require public reporting on quality measures through a user-friendly website.
- Increase the supply of health care professionals by establishing loan repayment programs for public health workers and physicians who chose to work in underserved communities. Expand funding for the National Health Service Corps and Title VII.
- Develop, through a multi-stakeholder process, quality measures that allow assessments of health outcomes; continuity and coordination of care; safety, effectiveness and timeliness of care; health disparities; and appropriate use of health care resources.

I hope you understand that addressing health disparities is a vital solution to the soaring cost of healthcare and will increase the quality of care Americans receive. I appreciate your contribution to the health reform bill that will make America a better, healthier country.