

# Congress of the United States

Washington, D.C. 20515

October 25, 2017

The Honorable Donald J. Trump  
President of the United States  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Mr. President:

We have welcomed your comments about the need to lower prescription drug prices and your recognition of the negative role of large pharmaceutical corporations that boost their profits at the American public's expense. That is why we are so concerned about reports that Alex Azar, recent president of Eli Lilly's U.S. affiliate Lilly USA, could be nominated as Secretary of the Department of Health and Human Services. We vigorously urge you not to nominate Mr. Azar and, instead, to propose an individual who is committed to affordable drug pricing and to protecting the public's health.

As a candidate and as President, you have repeatedly addressed the need to "bring drug prices down,"<sup>1</sup> and criticized pharmaceutical corporations for "getting away with murder." As you have said, "Pharma has a lot of lobbies, a lot of lobbyists and a lot of power. And there's very little bidding on drugs. We're the largest buyer of drugs in the world, and yet we don't bid properly."<sup>2</sup>

As a former Eli Lilly top official (most recently serving for five years as president of Lilly USA), Alex Azar has played a key role in creating the very pharmaceutical industry practices that you have pledged to end. During his tenure, Eli Lilly routinely increased drug prices – many by double-digit amounts. For example, prices for Humalog and Humulin, insulin drugs, were increased by 20.8% in 2014, 16.9% in 2015, 7.5% in 2016 and 7.8% in the first quarter of 2017.<sup>3</sup> At the same time, Eli Lilly is fighting against federal and state legislation to increase drug pricing transparency so that policymakers and the public can learn whether there is any justification for those types of increases on a life-saving drug first developed nearly 100 years ago. In 2016 alone, Eli Lilly spent \$5.7 million lobbying Congress, the Department of Health and Human Services, and other administration agencies.

Mr. Azar's appointment would send a very clear signal that your Administration is happy to put the pharmaceutical fox in charge of the health care henhouse. It would also be a perfect example of revolving door practices that are undermining the public's trust in their federal government. From 2001 until early 2007, Mr. Azar worked at the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, as General Counsel and Deputy Secretary. He worked on a range of issues,

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<sup>1</sup> "Trump vows to bring drug prices way down," CNN Money, March 7, 2017.

<sup>2</sup> "Trump on drug prices: Pharma companies are 'getting away with murder,'" *The Washington Post*, January 11, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Eli Lilly raised prices on 9 drugs last week, CNBC.com, May 10, 2017.

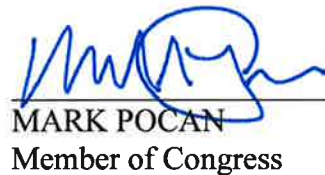
including the Medicare Modernization Act of 2003 that prevents Medicare from negotiating on prescription drug prices. That was a top priority of the pharmaceutical industry that Mr. Azar joined upon leaving the Department. Since leaving Eli Lilly in 2017, he runs Seraphim Strategies to provide strategic advice to the biopharmaceutical and health insurance industries that he would be tasked with overseeing as HHS Secretary.

The appointment of Mr. Azar would be an indication that your Administration is not committed to lowering prescription drug prices or to changing the practice of putting high-ranking industry officials in the position of regulating their past (and possibly future) employers. Again, we strongly urge you not to nominate Mr. Azar.

Sincerely,



RAUL GRIJALVA  
Member of Congress



MARK POCAN  
Member of Congress



JAN SCHAKOWSKY  
Member of Congress