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December 15, 2013

Chairman Darrell E. Issa
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
2157 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Ranking Member Elijah Cummings
House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform
2471 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Honorable Chairman Issa and Ranking Member Cummings:

I am writing regarding the hearing of the House Committee on Oversight and Government Reform scheduled for Monday in Richardson, and I request that this statement be included in the record as part of this hearing.

The subject of the hearing, per the agenda, is "Who are the Navigators?" In the vast majority of cases here in Texas, they are hard-working, honorable people who are helping Texans find health insurance – and helping address our state's unfortunate status as having the nation's highest percentage of uninsured residents.

In many communities, highly respected groups such as the United Way have taken the lead in providing navigator services. These organizations have hired responsible people to help connect Texans with the insurance policy that works best for them. They've played a critical role, especially given the problematic introduction of the federal health insurance exchange that was created to help people in Texas and other states shop for insurance. (It should be noted that our Governor has

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steadfastly resisted efforts to create a health insurance exchange unique to Texas, or to accept tens of billions of federal dollars that would help keep Texans healthy through the Medicaid program.)

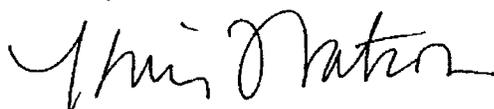
During the last legislative session, I carried a successful bill that allowed Texas both to create sensible navigator regulations addressing our state's specific needs, and to hopefully resolve potential legal or regulatory conflicts with the federal government. That bill should not be used as a mechanism to prevent navigators from doing their work or to make it harder for Texans to find health insurance. Unfortunately, the Texas Department of Insurance has proposed draft rules that, in many cases and without proper justification, appear likely to do more to impede navigators than protect consumers.

I hope your hearing represents a good-faith effort to look at what responsible navigators (and the responsible organizations employing them) are really doing; how they can be most effective in helping people find health insurance; how people with similar job responsibilities have been effective in helping the public navigate other federal healthcare programs; and how government can protect the public from the occasional bad actor.

It would be a shame if your hearing became an occasion to impugn the good work of honest people, or to try to score political points at the expense of those who need health coverage. I noticed with some regret that no navigators or navigator organizations were included on the list of intended witnesses for today's meeting (at least based on the agenda I saw online). I hope these groups are given an opportunity to testify – it's important that you hear first-hand about the work they're doing.

Frankly, the excessive politics surrounding what should be a basic and widely shared goal – finding health coverage for the uninsured – has made it too easy to be skeptical of some government proceedings. With such public skepticism in mind, I hope you will seek and stake out the considerable common ground around these widely shared priorities of keeping people healthy and protecting consumers. This can and should be an area where people come together and make things genuinely better for Texans and all Americans.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Kirk Watson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Kirk" and last name "Watson" clearly distinguishable.

Kirk Watson