

*Washington, DC* - Congressman Maurice Hinchey (D-NY), a member of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration (FDA), and Related Agencies, which oversees and allocates the FDA's budget, today issued the following statement regarding the agency's new rules for advisory board conflict of interest waivers. Hinchey has led the effort in Congress to end the FDA's practice of allowing researchers and doctors with financial conflicts of interest to participate on advisory panels for drug and device approvals. Hinchey successfully amended the House versions of the Fiscal Year 2006 and Fiscal Year 2007 Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies Appropriations bills and had language included in the base version of the Fiscal Year 2008 bill to prevent conflict of interest waivers from being issued for FDA advisory panel members. The Senate ultimately blocked the conflict of interest measure.

"The FDA's new conflict of interest rule for advisory panels is a significant step in the right direction as well as an acknowledgement by the agency that the current waiver system is broken. For years, the FDA granted waiver after waiver that resulted in advisory panels being filled by experts with direct financial interests in the drugs and devices being reviewed by those very same advisory panels. By making the standard for waivers more stringent and improving the voting system, the FDA is moving closer toward ensuring the only interest taken into account during these advisory panels is that of the American people.

"While the FDA took an important step forward today, there is a lot more work to be done. I strongly encourage the FDA to use today's rule announcement as a stepping stone toward greater progress at an agency that continues to malfunction on a variety of levels. It is my hope that the FDA will soon follow the language I've successfully offered in the House over the past several years to strictly prohibit any waivers from being granted for advisory panels. This country is filled with an extraordinary number of brilliant minds and there is no reason the FDA can't fill its advisory panels with experts who have no financial conflicts of interest whatsoever."