Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

January 28, 2005

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to request that you direct each department and agency of the Executive Branch to disclose to the appropriate Committee of the House of Representatives all public relations and advertising contracts signed during your Administration.

Over the past year, multiple investigations have revealed that federal agencies have employed secret publicity campaigns to promote administration priorities.

- In separate analyses, the Government Accountability Office found that the Department of Health and Human Services and the White House Office of National Drug Control Policy violated the congressional prohibition on publicity and propaganda by distributing fabricated video news reports.[1]

- An investigative report by *USA Today* revealed that the Department of Education paid a conservative commentator to support the No Child Left Behind Act in television and radio appearances.[2]

- Earlier this week, the *Washington Post* reported the Department of Health and Human Services had a contract with a syndicated columnist who promoted the President's marriage initiative.[3]

- A newly released congressional report found that public relations spending has more than doubled during the Bush Administration.[4]

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[1] U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Department of Health and Human Services, Centers for Medicare & Medicaid Services — Video News Releases* (May 19, 2004) (GAO/B-302710). U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Office of National Drug Control Policy — Video News Release* (Jan. 4, 2005) (GAO/B-303495).

[2] *White House Paid Commentator to Promote Law*, USA Today, (Jan. 7, 2005).

[3] *Writer Backing Bush Plan had Gotten Federal Contract*, Washington Post (Jan. 25, 2005).

- And today, *USA Today,* the *Los Angeles Times,* and *Salon.com* reported that the Department of Health and Human Services paid another conservative commentator thousands of dollars to support the marriage initiative, including by speaking about the importance of marriage to churches and community organizations.[5]

These developments raise serious concerns. Covert propaganda campaigns are unethical and illegal. Those disclosed to date mislead the American people about public policy and deceive the news media and press about the credibility of critiques of Administration policies. We very much hope the contracts revealed to this point are an aberration and not part of a pattern across federal agencies.

To assist us in understanding the scope of public relations and propaganda contracted for by federal agencies, we request that you provide to the Democratic Leader, and to the appropriate Committee of jurisdiction, the following:

(1) All contracts executed during the Bush Administration with public relations firms, advertising agencies, public opinion research firms, media organizations, and individual members of the media, including any modifications of such contracts.

(2) All subcontracts executed under the contracts identified under (1), including any modifications of such subcontracts.

(3) Any documents or communications that describe or assess the work performed under these contracts and subcontracts.

(4) A copy of the justification and approval documents for any of these contracts entered into using less than full and open competition.

The possibility of a widespread practice of covert propaganda raises the most serious of concerns. The Congress, the press, and the American people all deserve a full disclosure of the Administration's policy on such propaganda.

It has already been nearly one month since the Democratic Leader and Ranking Members Henry Waxman, George Miller, David Obey, and Elijah Cummings wrote to you requesting full

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[4] House Committee on Government Reform, *Federal Public Relations Spending*, (January 26, 2005).

[5] *HHS says it paid columnist for help*, USA Today, (January 28, 2005); *Federal Contracts With Columnists Prompt Change in Policy*, Los Angeles Times, (January 28, 2005); *Third columnist caught with hand in the Bush till*, Salon.com, (January 27, 2005).

disclosure of these contracts.[6] To date, we have received no reply to that inquiry. Now that there have been additional revelations, we would appreciate your cooperation with this inquiry, and would appreciate a complete response by March 1, 2005.

Sincerely,

Rep. Nancy Pelosi, House Democratic Leader
Rep. Steny H. Hoyer, House Democratic Whip
Rep. Robert Menendez, Chairman, House Democratic Caucus
Rep. James E. Clyburn, Vice Chair, House Democratic Caucus
Rep. Rosa DeLauro, Co-Chair, Steering and Policy Committee
Rep. Dave R. Obey, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Appropriations
Rep. Ike Skelton, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Armed Services
Rep. John M. Spratt, Jr., Ranking Minority Member, Committee on the Budget
Rep. George Miller, Ranking Minority Member Committee on Education and the Workforce
Rep. John D. Dingell, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Energy and Commerce
Rep. Barney Frank, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Financial Services
Rep. Henry A. Waxman, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Government Reform
Rep. Bennie Thompson, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Homeland Security
Rep. Juanita Millender-McDonald, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on House Administration
Rep. Tom Lantos, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on International Relations
Rep. John Conyers, Jr., Ranking Minority Member, Committee on the Judiciary
Rep. Louise McIntosh Slaughter, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Rules
Rep. Bart Gordon, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Science
Rep. Nydia M. Velazquez, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Small Business
Rep. James L. Oberstar, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Transportation
Rep. Lane Evans, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Veterans' Affairs
Rep. Charles B. Rangel, Ranking Minority Member, Committee on Ways and Means

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[6] Letter from House Democratic Leader Nancy Pelosi et al. to the President (Jan. 7, 2005).