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Ford continues HMO fight; plans Depot meeting

By Tony Jones

Tri-State Defender Staff Writer

Rep. Harold Ford Jr. will convene a meeting Tuesday with citizens from the Depot area and representatives from agencies that could possibly assist them with their health problems and rebuilding their community.

Set for 10 a.m. in the Federal Building downtown, officials from HUD's regional office and the Department of Health and Human Services will attend the meeting, along with representatives from several local concerns.

Local officials attending the meeting will be Dexter Mullin, from the city's Office of Planning and Development; Ed Cross from Housing and Community Development; and Yvonne Madlock, who will head a team from the Memphis and Shelby County Health Department.

Citizens in the area feel that run-off from the defunct Defense Depot at 2199 Airways has contaminated ground water and soil in the area, leading to an uncommonly high incidence of cancer and other health-related problems.

They also are vociferous in their pursuit for more neighborhood amenities. "We don't even have a library available to our children," community voice Doris Bradshaw angrily states. "No clinic, no park, just widespread cancer," she comments in disgust.

Ford is also trumpeting an investigative report by the Public Citizen's Congress Watch that excoriates Senate Republican leadership, including Tennessee's Bill Frist, saying that big money has bought off their concern for constituents.

Ford says, "It's sad at this stage that the Republicans will continue to shamelessly assist the industry in their attempt to derail any

meaningful legislation," that would support constituent needs above those of managed-care firms. "This report is evidence that Republican leaders hold the interest of campaign contributors and special interest groups in higher regard than the will of the American people."

He hits Frist directly. "I call on Sen. Frist—whose family controls one of the largest chains of for-profit hospitals—to set aside his own personal financial interest and help move meaningful managed-care reform immediately."

Frist has stated that he divested himself from the family's business when he took office. A Senate Ethics Committee has exonerated him as being clean on the matter, but the committee is Republican-controlled.

According to the report, members of the pro-HMO Health Benefits Care have given more than \$1.4 million in campaign contributions to Republican Party candidates.

A copy can be obtained at <http://www.publiccitizen.org/congress/reform/hmo-senate.htm>.

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