Douglas E. Henley, M.D., FAAFP, Executive Vice President American Academy of Family Physicians P.O. Box 11210 Shawnee Mission, KS 66207-1210

Dear Dr. Henley:

We were distressed and disappointed to learn that the American Academy of Family Physicians, as a means of "diversifying our sources of funding...outside the pharmaceutical industry," has created a "Consumer" Alliance with corporations, with the first deal being with the Coca-Cola Co.¹ As you undoubtedly know, Coca-Cola is the country's and the world's largest producer of the only food or beverage that has been demonstrated to promote overweight and obesity. Because of the kinds of products it markets, Coca-Cola Co. is desperate to burnish its soiled reputation...which is why it is paying hundreds of thousands of dollars to have a relationship with your organization.

We anticipate that you will argue that the payment to AAFP is solely to provide information on your Web site about low-calorie beverages and sweeteners. A Coca-Cola spokeswoman was quoted in AAFP's press release as saying, "Our partnership will help provide Americans with credible information..." Frankly, it is hard to think of any "partner" that is less appropriate or more biased, considering the company's understandable defense of artificial sweeteners, natural sweeteners, and soft drinks.

Scientists and public health officials generally agree that excess soft-drink consumption plays an important role in promoting obesity. There are questions about the safety of such artificial sweeteners as aspartame, saccharin, and acesulfame-potassium and about the utility of diet soft drinks in weight-loss.

While AAFP may contend that it will have final say on the information that it provides to the public, it would be naïve to think that the AAFP would risk offending its funder—after all, one does not ordinarily bite the hand that feeds one, and there may be another grant in the future.

The campaign against obesity must be waged using the most potent means possible. The AAFP's Web site should be criticizing sugar-sweetened beverages in the strongest language and providing candid, objective advice about the health and safety questions related to diet drinks. But with Coca-Cola providing funding, the AAFP simply cannot do that.

In the past, the AAFP's Web site has said, "Limit consumption of sugar-sweetened beverages." We urge the AAFP to regain its credibility by rejecting the deal with Coca-Cola. If the AAFP declines to do that, we urge your organization to reassert its support for

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¹ www.aafp.org/online/en/home/publications/news/news-now/inside-aafp/20091006cons-alli-coke.html

² http://www.aafp.org/afp/20080701/56.html

the public health (and its own independence) by supporting a warning label on caloric sugarsweetened beverages and a federal tax on soft drinks to support health promotion or health insurance programs.

Sincerely,

Henry Blackburn, M.D. Division of Epidemiology School of Public Health University of Minnesota Minneapolis, MN 55454

George A. Bray, M.D., MACP, MACE Boyd Professor Louisiana State University Pennington Biomedical Research Center, Baton Rouge, LA

David V.B. Britt Retired CEO, Sesame Workshop Guilford, CT 06437

Brian A. Burt, B.D.Sc., M.P.H., Ph.D. Professor Emeritus University of Michigan School of Public Health Ann Arbor, MI 48103

Carlos Arturo Camargo, Jr.,M.D. Associate Professor Department of Epidemiology Harvard School of Public Health Director, EMNet Coordinating Center Massachusetts General Hospital Boston, MA 02114

Marilyn E. Carroll, Ph.D.
Professor of Psychiatry and Neuroscience
Department of Psychiatry
University of Minnesota
Minneapolis, MN 55455

Hans A. Diehl, Dr.H.Sc., M.P.H., C.N.S., FACN Director, Lifestyle Medicine Institute Clinical Professor of Preventive Medicine, School of Medicine, Loma Linda University Loma Linda, CA 92354
Caldwell B. Esselstyn, Jr., M.D.
Preventive Medicine Consultant
Director Cardiovascular Disease
Prevention and Reversal Program
Wellness Institute Cleveland Clinic
Lyndhurst, Ohio 44124

Matthew W. Gillman, MD, SM
Director, Obesity Prevention Program
Professor, Department of Population
Medicine
Harvard Medical School/Harvard Pilgrim
Health Care Institute
Boston, MA 02215

Joan Gussow, M.Ed., Ed.D., Professor Emerita of Nutrition and Education Teachers College, Columbia University New York, NY

Stephen Havas, M.D., M.P.H., M.S. Adjunct Professor Department of Preventive Medicine Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine Chicago, IL 60611

Suzanne Havala Hobbs, Dr.P.H., M.S., R.D., FADA Clinical Associate Professor and Director, Doctoral Program in Health Leadership Gillings School of Global Public Health University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill Chapel Hill, NC

Michael F. Jacobson, Ph.D.* Executive Director Center for Science in the Public Interest Washington, DC 20009 Lenny Lesser M.D. RWJ Clinical Scholars Program University of California, Los Angeles Los Angeles, CA

David A. Levitsky, Ph.D. Stephen H. Weiss Presidential Fellow Professor of Nutrition and Psychology 112 Savage Hall, Cornell University Ithaca, NY 14853

Sushma Palmer, D.Sc., Chairman Center for Communications, Health & the Environment Washington, DC 20007

Barry M. Popkin, Ph.D.
Director, UNC Interdisciplinary Obesity
Program
The Carla Smith Chamblee Distinguished
Professor of Global Nutrition
School of Public Health
University of North Carolina at Chapel
Hill
Chapel Hill, NC 27516

Bill Reger-Nash, Ed.D.
Professor, Department of Community
Medicine
West Virginia University
Morgantown, WV 26506

Meir Stampfer, M.D., Dr.P.H. Professor of Nutrition and Epidemiology Department of Epidemiology Harvard School of Public Health Boston, MA 02115

Walter Willett, M.D., Dr. P.H. Chairman, Department of Nutrition Fredrick John Stare Professor of Epidemiology Harvard School of Public Health Boston, MA 02115

Grace Wyshak, Ph.D. Harvard School of Public Health 665 Huntington Avenue Boston MA 02115

Lisa R. Young, Ph.D., R.D.
Department of Nutrition, Food Studies, and Public Health
New York University
New York, NY

cc: Ted Epperly, M.D., FAAFP, president Lori J. Heim, M.D., FAAFP, president-elect

^{*} Please respond to Michael F. Jacobson, CSPI, #300, 1875 Connecticut Ave., Washington, DC 20009.