Senator Arlen Specter Said To Hold a Cell Phone Hearing

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Senator Arlen Specter (D-PA) will hold a hearing on cell phones and health on September 14. So says Devra Davis, an activist scientist at the University of Pittsburgh. If Specter follows through, it would be the centerpiece of a conference she is organizing that week in Washington, as well as a triumph for Davis herself. She is on a mission to make cell phones a more visible public health issue in the U.S. and to secure funding for a major research program. It would be the first time in more than 30 years that the U.S. Senate has addressed RF/microwave health risks.

"I have spoken and met with Senator Specter and his senior staffers," Davis told *Microwave News*. "They are planning to hold a hearing on this important topic." Among those who will be invited to testify, she said, are Frank Barnes of the University of Colorado, Boulder, Margaret Hamburg, the commissioner of the FDA, Dariusz Leszczynski of Finland's radiation protection agency (STUK), Israeli epidemiologist Siegal Sadetzki, a member of the Interphone group, as well as Davis herself. Barnes served as the chairman of the committee that prepared the 2008 National Academy of Sciences-National Research Council report on research needs on potential impacts of wireless radiation. Leszczynski is helping to organize the conference and Sadetzki is on its steering committee.

Davis is confident enough to have included the Specter hearing in the draft agenda of the conference, which she has posted on the Web site of the Environmental Health Trust, an offshoot of the Devra Lee Davis Charitable Foundation. The *Expert Conference on Cell Phones and Public Policy Questions* will be held September 13-15 at the Credit Union House, which is strategically located "within walking distance of the Senate."

Davis said that the official invitations for the meeting have not yet been sent out due to "press of health care issues." She cautioned, "Of course, the timing of events in Washington are difficult to predict." Specter is deeply involved in the health care reform

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debate and is facing a tough reelection campaign. A picture of him being confronted by an angry constituent at a town hall meeting was on the front-page of the *New York Times* last week with a story headlined, "Senator Goes Face to Face with Dissent." Specter is a brain tumor survivor; he is also fighting Hodgkin's disease.

John Myers, a Specter legislative aide, did not respond to a request for confirmation that the hearing will be held on September 14. Davis assured *Microwave News* that the Senator's staff is fully engaged in preparing for the hearing, even though no formal announcement has yet been made.

The cell phone industry is largely boycotting the conference. The only industry participant on the latest version of the agenda is Jack Rowley of the GSM Association. He is listed as "invited." Rowley is on vacation this week and was unavailable for comment. Davis said that he is still "mulling it over." Motorola's C.K. Chou declined to come because he felt the list of invited speakers is not balanced. The current program does favor the side of the cell phone debate that favors precaution. The only possible source of disagreement among the speakers would likely come from Om Gandhi of the University of Utah and Niels Kuster of IT'IS Foundation who have been feuding for over a decade over the potential risks to children.

Davis sees the meeting as a first step towards establishing an RF health research program in the U.S. For the last 25 years, the federal government has funded very few studies. To that end, Specter's support is key.

Over the last year, Davis has worked hard to raise the visibility of cell phone health risks. Last July, Ronald Herberman, the then director of the University of Pittsburgh Cancer Institute, issued a call for precaution in the use of cell phones —a move she encouraged (see our posts of **July 23, 25 & 28, 2008**). While the initiative prompted a good amount of press coverage, it was badly received by the cancer establishment, some members of which have been critical of her 2007 book, *The Secret History of the War on Cancer.* Davis no longer has a position at the cancer center. She said she resigned. Davis remains a professor at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health. She said that she would continue to have an appointment at the school through the 2009-2010 academic year. At the same time she has moved her office to Washington.

In September 2008, not long after he issued his appeal, Herberman testified at a Congressional hearing called by Rep. Denis Kucinich (D-OH). He said that, looking at government statistics, he had been "struck" by the fact that the incidence of brain cancer has been increasing over the last ten years, particularly among 20-29 year-olds. (See our "Are Brain Cancer Rates Rising Among Young Adults?") The peer-reviewed paper with those results will appear soon, Davis said. She and Herberman and Melissa Bondy of the M.D. Anderson Cancer Center in Houston are all coauthors of the forthcoming paper. Bondy will also be at the conference.

Kucinich and Rep. Edward Markey (D-MA) have been invited to participate at a round-table discussion on September 15 at the

close of the conference.

Part of the money for the meeting has come from a grant to the University of Pittsburgh from the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS). Chris Portier, an associate director of the institute, is a member of the conference steering committee. On July 31, the Competence Initiative for the Protection of Humanity, Environment and Democracy in Germany issued an "Appeal to Support the Conference." It stated, in part, "If the conference in Washington fails for financial reasons, this would mean to miss a great chance that independent research is heard in the political field."

Money seems to be in short enough supply that Davis is planning to ask reporters (*Microwave News* included) to pay the $100 registration fee she is asking from all attendees except invited speakers. That may hamper press coverage. One long-time Washington journalist was skeptical. "No one from the press will come," he predicted.

Margaret Hamburg, FDA, Dariusz Leszczynski, Siegal Sadetzki, cell phones, brain tumors, Om Gandhi,

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