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Nigel Wicks Esq CBE
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18 March 1988

Dear Nigel,

NHS REVIEW

Earlier this month my Secretary of State received a letter from Donald Dewar referring to press reports about the membership of the Government's NHS review and the omission of any reference to Scottish membership. Mr Dewar made great play of the responsibility Mr Rifkind has for the Health Service in Scotland and asked for an assurance that he was involved in planning any changes. He released his letter to the press. The Opposition parties will undoubtedly pursue this issue, both at Question Time and more particularly in the context of a debate on the Health Service which is likely to take place in Scottish Grand Committee after the Easter recess. Clearly Mr Rifkind cannot avoid some reply.

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My Secretary of State is anxious to ensure that the response he will give by letter to Mr Dewar and the line to be taken by Scottish Office Ministers in the debate is acceptable to colleagues. He appreciates that, while policy is being initially reviewed and options assessed within Government, the Secretary of State for Social Services should take the lead for the Health Ministers. Mr Rifkind would however hope to be able to offer shortly his suggestions, by way of a paper relating to the Scottish health scene, for consideration by the Prime Minister and her group of Ministerial colleagues if that were considered to be a helpful input to their work.

If so, Mr Rifkind would want to take the line publicly that all the relevant Departments including his own were making an input to the Government's review of the Health Service. If pressed on the composition of the body conducting the review, he would say that it was a review by the Government as a whole but that there was nothing at all unusual in a smaller group of Ministers having an initial go at a subject before it was considered more widely. Obviously, he would not be drawn on matters of substance or on the timetable of events but, if the Prime Minister agreed, he would indicate that consultations on implementation would be likely to follow announcement of the results of the Government's review.

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My Secretary of State would be glad to know if the proposal to put in a paper shortly and the public line to take suggested above are acceptable.

I am copying this to Private Secretaries to the Secretary of State for Social Services, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, the Secretary of State for Wales, and the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

Yours Sincerely

MS Jones

PP **DAVID CRAWLEY**
Private Secretary

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