

Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League

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October 17, 2007

The Honorable David Price
2162 Rayburn Building
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Proposed zoonotic disease laboratory

Dear Congressman Price:

My co-worker Lou Zeller and I were pleased to meet with Phillip Feagan and Laura Thrift on Monday of this week at your Washington, DC office. Our Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League is a league of community groups; we have members in all of the counties in your district. I write to spell out our major concerns about the zoonotic disease lab proposed for Granville County.

First, although the Department of Homeland Security and some members of the NC Consortium have described the proposed laboratory as a center for research on animal diseases, the specific diseases for this research are those which can be transmitted to humans. DHS has admitted that 10% of these diseases have no vaccines, treatments or cures. These facts alone would lead our staff and our technical advisors to suspect that the proposed laboratory would be a biological weapons research laboratory. However, many other facts lead to the same conclusion.

Second, the history of this proposed facility should make everyone skeptical. As you may know, the US Department of Energy attempted to site this zoonotic disease lab at the Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory in California and the Los Alamos National Laboratory in New Mexico. We must ask why an agricultural research lab would fit into the mission of our nation's weapons laboratories. As we related to Mr. Feagan on October 15th, an officer of the National Biodefense Analysis and Countermeasures Center of the Department of Homeland Security outlined the task areas for biological threat analysis as "Acquire, Grow, Modify, Store, Stabilize, Package, Disperse." These are provocative actions which will be seen by other nations as the development of biological weapons.

Third, farmers and other community people are scratching their heads about why an agricultural facility should be exempt from the federal Freedom of Information Act. At the public hearing on September 18, you may recall that the DHS representatives had no answers to questions from the public about toxic emissions from the facility to the air and water. The full permitting process including a complete EIS, an open permit application and full public participation must be part of any permitting process.

Fourth, residents of Granville County, people from across North Carolina and indeed the other targeted states have little confidence in the US Department of Homeland Security to tell the truth or to protect public health and the environment. So many questions remain

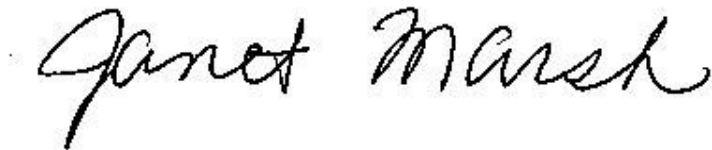
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unanswered: What would be the environmental and health impacts of a facility which would create and test dangerous diseases? Why are the dozens of existing laboratories in North Carolina inadequate to protect the state's livestock? How would local firefighters and EMT's—both volunteer and professional—be notified of an emergency? Could they handle accidental or deliberate releases involving genetically modified biological agents? How will first responders be protected? How and when will they be trained and equipped? How and when will the public be notified?

Fifth, the genetic modification and aerosolization of microbes and toxins are the methods by which biological weapons are created. A true disease research facility requires open scientific debate and peer review. But since 2002 representatives of United States have hampered international progress on inspection and transparency under the Biological Weapons Convention. We believe that the zoonotic disease laboratory would, at best, cause suspicion about US biological weapons production and research and, at worst, inspire other counties to establish similar secretive weapons facilities.

Finally, we ask that you use your authority as Chairman of the Subcommittee on Homeland Security to hold hearings into the purpose and operations of the proposed disease laboratory. Although the Consortium has denied that the lab would have a biological weapons mission, DHS representatives have not done so. What guarantees do North Carolinians have that the mission is innocuous and positive? **Further, we ask that you work to remove the FOIA exemption from this facility and make the entire siting, construction and operations transparent.** No facility sponsored by this Administration will have public confidence unless the cloak of secrecy is removed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Janet Marsh". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Janet Marsh
Executive Director