

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20510
June 27, 2011

Honorable Kathleen Sebelius
Secretary, Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20201

Secretary Sebelius:

We write to express our strong support for the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health's Spokane Research Laboratory, and the critical work it has done and continues to do in a wide range of industries essential to the economy in the Northwest, and the country as a whole. The work of the Spokane Research Laboratory has been vital to maintaining and improving the health and safety of workers in an array of industries, including metal and non-metal mines throughout the Western United States.

However, it is our understanding that the capacity and integrity of the Spokane Research Laboratory has been seriously compromised over recent years. Over the past two years, the NIOSH research program was reorganized to, in effect, make the Spokane Research Laboratory a satellite of the Pittsburgh Laboratory. The Director, Deputy Director and all Branch Chief positions at the Spokane Research Laboratory have been eliminated and first-line supervisors in Pittsburgh now manage the remaining research personnel in Spokane. Furthermore, the Spokane Research Laboratory's budget allocation for the research program has also been eliminated, and all that remains is the administrative allocation of just over \$1 million to cover facilities cost. The salaries for the Spokane Research Laboratory's research staff are now paid from the budget allocations to the Pittsburgh office.

We would suggest that this is no way to run and manage a research program with the historic integrity and contributions such as those in Spokane. Furthermore, the industries and occupations benefited by the work at Spokane deserve better. While the impact is surely felt quite broadly, the greatest negative impact of this reorganization has been and will continue to be to the western mining industry and the health and safety of its workers. Western United States mining health and safety issues, particularly those of the metal and non-metal sector, cannot be—and will not be—diminished in favor of Eastern United States coal mining health and safety issues, which are distinctly different from each other.

The SRL is one of the lowest costs laboratories NIOSH operates, in part because the federal government owns the facility. It is our opinion that it makes little sense, especially when resources are so scarce, to allow federally-owned space to lay idle while the needs of America's miners can be appropriately addressed at the SRL, and at a value to taxpayers.

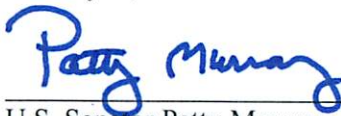
In addition, it is our belief that the Spokane Research Laboratory has the capacity to accommodate additional research programs. There are exceptional and ideally suited additional facilities associated with the Spokane Research Laboratory to effectively and efficiently conduct the research necessary to

address occupational safety and health within "high-risk" industries such as commercial fishing, aviation, agriculture, logging, and oil and gas industries. Existing federal facilities in Spokane can and should be utilized to carry out high-risk industry research programs.

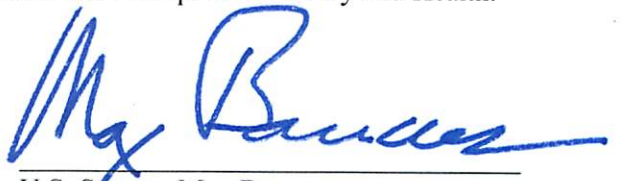
It is for these reasons that we ask for your direct intervention to return the Spokane Research Lab to its previous full capacity, and to require that the Mining Program managers based in Pittsburgh re-establish the Spokane Research Laboratory's Director, Deputy Director and all Branch Chief positions. We also ask that you start the process of returning the Spokane Research Laboratory's budget to fiscal year 2002 levels and staffing levels to those in fiscal year 2003. Further, we strongly recommend that Spokane be considered the site for additional research programs in high-risk industries.

We appreciate your attention to this issue and trust that you will consider our recommendations and input related to the Spokane Research Laboratory in the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health.

Thank you,



U.S. Senator Patty Murray



U.S. Senator Max Baucus



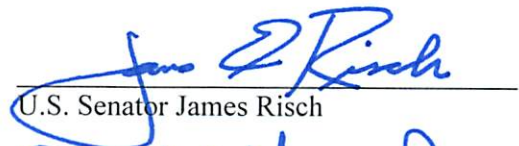
U.S. Senator Mark Begich



U.S. Senator Maria Cantwell



U.S. Senator Mike Crapo



U.S. Senator James Risch



U.S. Senator Ron Wyden



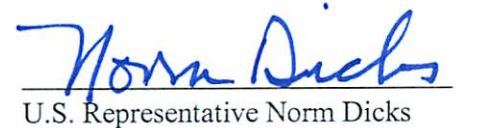
U.S. Representative Cathy McMorris-Rodgers



U.S. Representative Jay Inslee



U.S. Representative Raul Labrador



U.S. Representative Norm Dicks