

June 24, 2002

The Honorable W.J. "Billy" Tauzin
Chairman
Committee on Energy and Commerce
2125 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Mr. Chairman:

We at the Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB) join our fellow citizens in supporting the efforts of Congress and the Administration to provide adequately for homeland defense against future acts of terrorism. There can be no doubt that, as the President and our congressional leaders have said, prosecution of the war against terrorism will require new vigilance and new ways of organizing our daily lives and the conduct of our government.

During your upcoming deliberations on the creation of a Department of Homeland Security, we respectfully request that you consider carefully the implications of any significant structural changes affecting infectious disease research for civilian biodefense.

"Top Down" Research A Concern:

In performing research on the infectious agents likely to be used as weapons by terrorists (anthrax, smallpox, etc.), the challenge is to determine whether research priorities should be established by scientists addressing questions about infectious agents globally (malaria, tuberculosis, etc.) or by agency officials with a presumption as to which avenues of research are most productive.

The risk is that a "top-down" approach to research might preclude the discovery and development of new understandings of infectious agents in the global and richest possible context of today's science.

There are many times more scientists with expertise and research programs focused on the problems of vaccine development for diseases such as malaria and tuberculosis, which affect hundreds of millions of

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persons globally, than there are working specifically on anthrax and smallpox. Our view is that the increased efforts of infectious disease scientists, sponsored by biodefense funding, are most likely to result in important advances in vaccine development directly applicable to CDC Category A Select Agents.

Research Funding Transfers:

Our understanding is that major portions of the HHS research and public health portfolio are to be transferred to the new Department and that research functions will be "contracted out" to NIH, NIAID and CDC. Funding transfers are likely to be accompanied by a re-allocation of and redistribution according to different research priorities. If there is no re-allocation, such interagency transfers are pointless and will only add transaction costs and delay to performing the research.

FASEB is comprised of 21 societies with more than 60,000 members, making it the largest coalition of biomedical research associations in the United States. FASEB's mission is to enhance the ability of biomedical and life scientists to improve-through their research-the health, well-being and productivity of all people.

Our members share your belief that enhanced federal coordination and oversight is essential to protect all Americans from bioterrorism, but we are concerned that the proposed structural research changes, however well-meaning, might well be counter-productive.

Respectfully,

Robert R. Rich, M.D.
President