

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

July 11, 2003

The President
The White House
Washington, DC 20500

Dear Mr. President:

We are writing to urge you to reverse the decision to divert millions of dollars from HIV/AIDS and other crucial research at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) to pay for the development of a new anthrax vaccine. We agree that the development of an anthrax vaccine is important, but it should not be funded by robbing funds currently devoted to finding cures for HIV/AIDS, West Nile Virus, SARS, and other serious public health threats.

We have learned that your Administration plans to take \$145 million of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID) 2003 budget to finance the research and development of the next generation anthrax vaccine. According to the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) one-quarter of this money will come from AIDS research funds, and another quarter from non-AIDS and nonbioterror funds.¹ IDSA has predicted that this shift of funds could cause NIAID to shorten the length of research grants by up to six months and says that some scientists have already had their research grants cut.²

This diversion of funds has been confirmed in a letter from Office of Management and Budget Director Bolten to Senator Specter and Senator Harkin.³

This is a serious mistake. The money that is being diverted is being used to research vaccines and treatments for very real public health threats. On July 7, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention confirmed the first human case of West Nile Virus in 2003. This disease, for which there is no vaccine and no treatment, infected 4,162 people and killed 284 people in the United States in 2002. The world has just experienced the emergence of another new disease, Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome (SARS), which has been the probable cause of death of over 800 people worldwide since it was first reported in November 2002. Right now, you are in Africa where the spread of HIV/AIDS is causing economic and social devastation. HIV/AIDS, West Nile Virus, and SARS are real public health threats that deserve to be treated as top priorities by our public health agencies.

There is absolutely no need to cut HIV/AIDS and other research to fund an anthrax vaccine. Congress is currently considering your Bioshield proposal, which would certainly have funding for just this kind of project. This proposal is likely to pass in the very near future.

¹ Infectious Diseases Society of American, *Infectious Diseases and HIV Physicians Oppose Shifting NIAID Research Dollars to Anthrax Vaccine Procurement*, (July 8, 2003) (press release).

² *Id.*

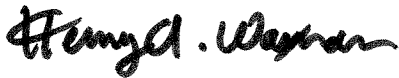
³ Letter from OMB Director Joshua Bolten to Sen. Arlen Specter (July 2, 2003).

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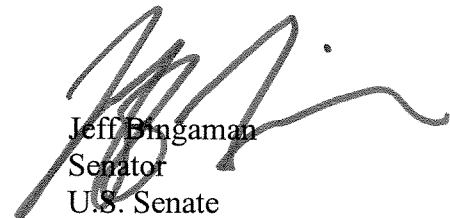
Furthermore, your Administration pushed for, and got, a massive tax cut worth \$350 billion. The \$145 million being taken from important NIAID research funds represents .04% of this tax cut.

The United States must be prepared in case of a bioterror attack, and that preparation includes the development and procurement of a next generation anthrax vaccine. This is an important goal and must be a priority. However, preparing for a possible anthrax attack cannot be done at the expense of dealing with very real public health threats, such as West Nile Virus, SARS, HIV/AIDS, or a new emerging infectious disease.

Sincerely,



Henry A. Waxman
Member
U.S. House of Representatives



Jeff Bingaman
Senator
U.S. Senate