

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

January 25, 2006

The Honorable Michael O. Leavitt
Secretary
The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt,

We are gravely concerned about the recent reported deaths of a number of 9/11 responders from health complications related to their Ground Zero exposure. Even though thousands have been identified as sick as a direct result of their exposure to the toxins of Ground Zero, as of today there appears to be no one individual in the federal government who is charged with coordinating a response to the health effects of 9/11. Therefore, we write today to formally request that HHS appoint a health professional as a 9/11 Health Czar to coordinate the federal government's response to responders' health complications related to their Ground Zero exposure.

The need for the creation of this position within HHS is underscored by media reports which indicate that several responders have died from 9/11 health effects since the terrorist attacks. The most recent victim, James Zadroga, was a detective in the New York Police Department who suffered from the "World Trade Center cough" that has become so prevalent among those who were at and around Ground Zero after 9/11.

Indeed, in 2004 the National Security Subcommittee of the House Government Reform Committee, led by Rep. Christopher Shays (R-CT), held a field hearing in New York focusing on 9/11 health effects. At that hearing, we asked a variety of government officials to tell us who is in charge of coordinating the federal response to 9/11 health emergency, and those testifying could not answer. In our opinion, a response to those questions would be no more readily available today than they were two years ago.

As you know, the health problems affecting 9/11 responders are clearly real and dangerous, and we have been long urging improvements in the government's response to the responders' and residents' health needs. Unfortunately, the sad truth is that the government response has been inadequate. New York State's screening program for State employees was shut down after a first round of exams, and the screening program established for federal employees was shut down after only 400 exams. Fortunately, the medical monitoring program coordinated by the Mount Sinai Center for Occupational and Environmental Medicine was eventually able to incorporate New York State employees into their program, but there is still not an avenue for federal employees to be monitored or treated.

To this day - more than four years after 9/11 - there has been a lack of federal funding for treatment of 9/11 responders, lower Manhattan residents or those who worked in the area around

Ground Zero. In fact, it was not until a few weeks ago that federal funds for treatment were first appropriated. Just to get this money, we had to fight to take back \$125 million in federal funding for 9/11 workers' compensation claims rescinded in the President's Budget and the Labor, Health and Human Services Appropriations Bill. Fortunately, last month, the bipartisan New York congressional delegation, along with Mayor Bloomberg and Governor Pataki, was successful in restoring the funds and securing an agreement to provide \$75 million for monitoring programs and, for the first time, actual treatment. These funds are greatly appreciated and they are a positive step, but more than four years has passed since 9/11 and responders and residents have become increasingly sick.

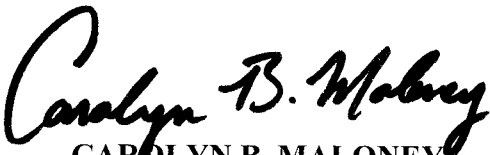
Over the past three years, we have been in frequent contact with you, your predecessor, the president and other administration officials, providing information about 9/11 responders' health needs and requesting additional help for the responders. The gravity of the health issues was first evident more than three years ago, and the recent deaths are an ominous sign.

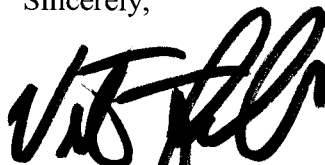
The creation of a 9/11 Health Czar would also finally provide answers to questions that have been ignored for too long, including:


- * What is the administration's plan to deal with all of the health effects of 9/11 for responders and residents who are sick as a result of exposure to toxins at Ground Zero?
- * What is the administration's plan for long-term monitoring and treatment of these responders and residents?
- * Can we be assured that the \$75 million Congress directed to the five entities providing health monitoring and treatment for 9/11 workers will be distributed quickly and efficiently so that none of the funds will be diverted or delayed?

We urge you to take immediate action to address the situation, and we would like to meet with you to further discuss this issue. We look forward to your response and to meeting with you, and we hope that the federal response to our ill 9/11 heroes improves soon. Thank you for your attention to this matter.


Sincerely,

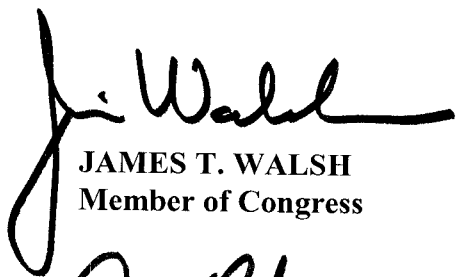

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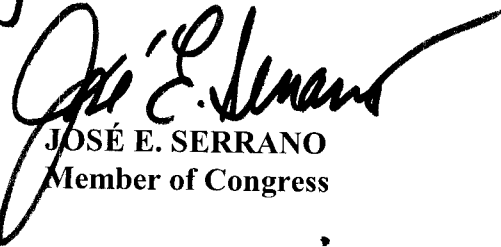

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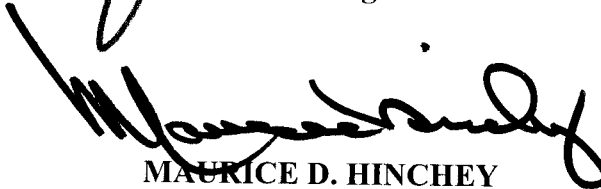
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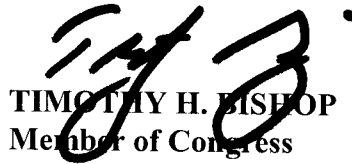
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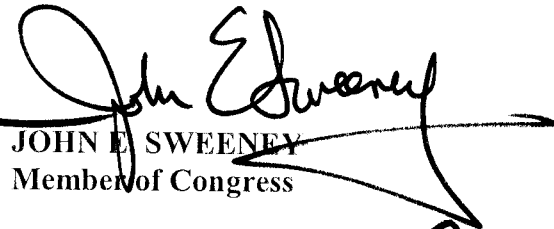
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