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18 September 2006

The Honorable Rob Portman, Director
Office of Management and Budget
1650 Pennsylvania Ave NW
Washington, DC 20503

Dr. P. Patrick Leahy, Acting Director
United States Geological Survey
12201 Sunrise Valley Drive, MS-100
Reston, VA 20192

Gentlemen:

I am writing to oppose your intention to competitively bid the research and testing currently performed by the National Water Quality Laboratory (NWQL) in Lakewood, Colorado. Competitively bidding government functions to the private industry – known as the A-76 process – is a process that was designed to make sure the government is operating efficiently. I am certain there are government operations that would better serve the public by transferring some of their work to private industry. I am equally certain that the National Water Quality Laboratory is not among them.

As the only facility in the country dedicated to research and analysis of emerging contaminants in our nation's rivers, lakes, streams and water supply, the NWQL's service is so intimately related to the public interest and public health and safety that it is inherently a governmental function. This function is too important to our nation to allow it to be taken over by the lowest bidder. The cutting-edge research that is performed at NWQL helps identify the prevalence of new contaminants for which no environmental standard yet exists. The research and services performed at the NWQL must continue to be conducted by federal employees, whose loyalties are to science and to providing unbiased scientific analysis.

The A-76 process should be used as an economic tool to make the government more efficient. In this case, however, I fear that outsourcing would undermine current and future environmental standards for the nation's water resources. This particular decision is all the more egregious because it specifically seeks to dismantle research on emerging contaminants in our drinking water. The NWQL provides environmental analytical services and high-quality, reproducible data on trace levels of contaminants in the water, sediment and invertebrate tissue of our nation's waterways. Their customers include municipalities, the Environmental Protection Agency, the National Park Service, and the Centers for Disease Control. NWQL identifies and monitors contaminants in water ranging from elevated estrogen levels related to prescription drug use, to perchlorate and MTBE from gasoline and vehicle emissions. These contaminants may have adverse effects on the health of Americans and the environment even when present in only trace amounts.

I strongly urge you to reconsider your decision to attempt to dismantle the National Water Quality Laboratory.

Sincerely,



Ken Salazar
United States Senator