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United States Government Accountability Office  
Washington, DC 20548

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August 27, 2010

The Honorable Rush Holt  
House of Representatives

Dear Mr. Holt:

Thank you for your letter of May 10, 2010, jointly signed by a number of your colleagues, requesting that the Government Accountability Office answer specific questions regarding the scientific and technical methods used during the FBI investigation of the 2001 anthrax attacks. The questions are: (1) What microbial and technical forensic methods did the FBI use to conclude that Mr. Bruce Ivins was the perpetrator of the 2001 anthrax attack; how reliable and reproducible were those methods; and were the methods validated? (2) What scientific concerns and uncertainties, if any, remain? (3) What agencies, including intelligence agencies, are responsible for monitoring high containment laboratories in the U.S. and abroad; how do they monitor these laboratories; and how effective is their monitoring?

GAO accepts your request as work that is within the scope of its authority, subject to the conditions outlined below. Please know that we may encounter challenges to our access to sensitive and classified information from the FBI and the intelligence agencies. We will consult with you if this occurs.

Your request has been assigned to Dr. Nancy Kingsbury, Managing Director, Applied Research and Methods. As you are aware, the FBI requested the National Academy of Sciences on September 15, 2008 to conduct an independent review of the scientific approaches the FBI used during its investigation. The NAS review was initiated in April 2009 and is scheduled for completion by this fall. In order for us to avoid potential duplication or overlap, we will review the NAS study before scoping our work on the issues NAS is addressing. In the meantime, we will begin researching related scientific and technical questions and issues. When we have completed our work on the NAS report, we will consult further with you about whether there are additional areas we need to address. Finally, we have ongoing work for the House Committee on Energy and Commerce that will address your questions on monitoring high-containment laboratories.

Dr. Kingsbury or a member of her team will contact Mr. Patrick Eddington to discuss the unique scientific and technical issues GAO will address, your needs, and the

engagement objectives, scope, and methodology in accordance with GAO's protocols. As applicable, we will also be in contact with the cognizant Inspector General's office to ensure that we are not duplicating efforts. If an issue arises during this coordination, we will consult with you regarding its resolution.

If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Kingsbury at 202-512-2700 or Ms. Rosa Harris, Assistant Director, Congressional Relations, at 202-512-9492.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Ralph C. Dawn, Jr.", written in a cursive style.

Ralph C. Dawn, Jr.  
Managing Director  
Congressional Relations

Ref: CCAR 10-0821