

Statement of Congresswoman Maloney
Government Reform Committee
Subcommittee on National Security
Hearing on 9/11 Health Effects
September 8, 2004

Thank you Chairman Shays, thank you for holding this second hearing on the health effects of 9/11. Back in October, at the end of the first hearing, you promised to continue your work on this topic and once again you are showing that you're a man of your word.

It is my pleasure to welcome some friends from New York who have been working so hard on this problem since 9/11 and I am particularly interested in what the Government Accountability Office (GAO) has found as a result of their research into the health effects of 9/11 as well as the federal assistance for September 11th workers compensation costs.

It seems to me that after reading the prepared testimony of our witnesses that there are still some basic questions that can not be answered.

Three years after 9/11, it seems that we don't even know how many people are injured or how many still need medical treatment or who in the federal government is even looking out for them. I am interested in asking GAO about this.

I am also interested in hearing from them about what is known with regard to the high levels of injury and illness emerging as a result of the attacks.

For example, the most comprehensive program to date is the one that the New York Delegation, led by Senator Clinton, had to fight to fund - the national program offering actual medical screening exams coordinated by the Mt Sinai Center for Occupational & Environmental medicine. Preliminary analysis of WTC responders - both workers and volunteers - in that program - 12,000 of them in fact - show well over 50% required physical and/or mental health treatment and or aid immediately - even months following the 9/11 disaster. I am interested in hearing from Doctor Levin regarding the current state of this program.

From the GAO testimony, I am interested in the Johns Hopkins December 2001 study among non-firefighters which found, "among those who reported no previous history of lower respiratory symptoms, 34 percent reported developing a cough and 19 percent reported wheezing.

I am interested in hearing about the NIOSH survey of federal employees working near the World Trade Center Site that found 56 percent of respondents reported having a cough. But what is astounding to me is that of the 10,000 federal workers who responded to the World Trade Center, GAO found that only 412 exams have been completed. When we have seen that up to 90% of firefighters have reported health problems immediately after 9/11, why have less than 5% of the federal employees who responded been examined for illness?

The one program that we have that even attempts to track everyone is a phone survey. It was supposed to track between 250,000 and 400,000 responders, area workers and residents but only 55,000 are enrolled. There are so many problems with this so-called registry that even some unions who had members working at Ground Zero are telling their members not to participate due to privacy concerns.

All told we have 6 different programs that are tracking in some way the health effects of 9/11. Some are as simple as a phone call or a mailed questionnaire while others actually involve a doctor and a health exam. However, none include any treatment and no where can I see a federal coordination among them. Instead of coordination, it looks like you have a number of different programs going in different directions with different ways of collecting and analyzing data. Is this any way to treat the heroes of 9/11?

What I want to hear from our witness from the Administration is who in the federal government is in charge?

Who in the federal government is worried about these people? Who can they turn to for help?

We literally have thousands of rescue workers, area workers and local residents who are sick yet we have had to fight every step of the way just to set up programs that can monitor them. We still have done nothing to provide treatment.

The one possible avenue to receive some sort of compensation is the funding provided to the worker's compensation. It is unbelievable to me, with so much demonstrated need, the GAO finds in its testimony that of the \$25 million Congress appropriated for injured volunteers, only \$456,000 has been spent and only 31 percent of their claims had been resolved by the state. I would like to hear more about this from our witness, including what definition the state gave them for the term resolved.

If you were to tell me that we would not provide care for the heroes who so selflessly gave of themselves on 9/11, I would not believe you and I do not think the American people would believe you.

Yet we have individuals who are now so sick from their work at Ground Zero that they can not work, have lost their health care and the federal government's response is to turn a cold shoulder. Quite simply, they deserve to be treated better.

We give our veterans health care if they get wounded in battle, why should our fire fighters, police officers or relief workers be treated any differently?

This is the precise reason why Chairman Shays and I have introduced HR 4059, the Remember 9/11 Health Act. This legislation, modeled after a program that gives free federal health insurance to volunteer forest fire fighters who get injured while fighting a forest fire, provides federal health insurance to individuals who are sick as a direct result of 9/11.

The Senate has passed S.1279 offered by Senators Voinovich and Clinton, which sets up a

similar program for all major disasters, but the House has yet to act on it.

Immediately following the terrorist attacks, the most heart warming thing that happened was how all of America came together and tens of thousands of people came to Lower Manhattan to help. We all know of the deep sacrifices the FDNY, NYPD and the Port Authority made in terms of first responders who lost their lives. The story that is not told as often is of the thousands who have suffered from health problems. Unfortunately, we are not living up to our end of the bargain and we are not caring for heroes of 9/11.

Unless we take this opportunity now to care for them, we jeopardize the future response to disasters. We cannot afford having first responders and volunteers second guess their actions as they respond to a disaster.