

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

April 16, 2007

The Honorable David R. Obey
Chairman
House Committee on Appropriations
2358 Rayburn House Office Building
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Chairman Obey:

As you begin Conference Committee negotiations for the U.S. Troop Readiness, Veterans' Care, Katrina Recovery, and Iraq Accountability Appropriations Act of 2007, we respectfully request that you include \$283 million for medical monitoring and treatment for responders who were exposed to the toxins of Ground Zero while participating in the rescue, recovery and clean-up efforts after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. We urge you include \$50 million at a minimum. As you know Senators Clinton, Schumer and Menendez, among others, have managed to include \$3.6 million for these purposes in the Senate-passed bill.

In the aftermath of September 11th, responders and volunteers came from every state in the country to assist in the massive rescue, recover and clean-up efforts. While they worked in and around Ground Zero, they were exposed to a poisonous cocktail of toxins. It is well documented that thousands have become ill because of these exposures.

On March 16, we wrote to you requesting \$283 million in the FY2008 Labor, Health and Human Services and Education Appropriations bill for the World Trade Center Monitoring and Treatment Program administered by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH). As you know, \$283 million is the level of funding that NIOSH most currently estimated they would need per year to continue the current program of monitoring and treatment for responders. Enclosed please find copies of our letter and the internal NIOSH estimates both from December 2006 and January 2007.

While we look forward to working with you on this issue through the regular appropriations process, we strongly believe that taking care of those who responded to the emergency of 9/11 is a mission that must be fulfilled at least in part by emergency spending. The President says that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are in response to the attacks of 9/11, calling his effort the "War on Terror." Those who became sick after responding to 9/11 were among the first victims of the War on Terror, and we must not allow this Administration to forget them. To date, nearly all of the money appropriated for the 9/11 health emergency has come in Emergency Supplemental Appropriations bills.

There are several reasons why this program needs funding in the Emergency Supplemental. First and foremost, is that it is highly likely that the program as it is currently running will not have enough funds to continue its work through the end of the fiscal year.

In addition, there is simply not enough money this year to analyze and coordinate the monitoring and treatment. For example, the phone bank which determines eligibility for entrance into the monitoring program is woefully inadequate to do its job. In addition, there is crucial need for public health based disease surveillance staff to analyze data generated by the monitoring and treatment programs to identify possible emerging disease patterns. Similarly, more staff is needed to meet the ongoing data collection and clinical coordination needs created by the growing number of participants. Last, emergency funding is needed to provide a centralized, coordinated social work unit. Since current funding spread so thin, all resources are going to monitoring and treatment services, with no resources available to actually analyze the data that is being collected and coordinate the monitoring and treatment itself.

Some have said that we should not continue to fund monitoring and treatment for 9/11 responders in a piecemeal fashion, but rather work toward a comprehensive plan to address the problem. We wholeheartedly agree that a comprehensive plan is needed: that is precisely what we have been calling on the current Administration to produce for many years now. However, since the Administration has consistently refused to provide a comprehensive plan or deliver to Congress a request for all the resources needed, Congressional efforts to move forward on a comprehensive plan are severely hindered.

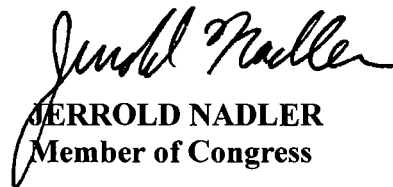
Examples abound of how the Administration has neglected, and more often refused, to provide the leadership necessary to address the 9/11 health emergency. Here, we will name just a few of the most recent examples. First, knowing that the current monitoring and treatment programs will likely run out of funding before the end of FY07, the Administration has taken no actions to prevent the impending shortfall. In addition, although they finally acknowledged the need for funds by requesting \$25 million as a last-minute “placeholder” in the President’s FY08 budget proposal, they have taken no real action to amend or update their request to provide anywhere near the funding needed for next year, let alone to address this year’s shortfall. Last, although the treatment program which finally began in November 2006 was intended to serve responders across the country and not just those in the New York Metropolitan area, the Administration has not taken steps to ensue sufficient funding to serve responders where they live. Therefore, those who are sick in Wisconsin, upstate New York, California and across the country cannot access the expert treatment they need without traveling to New York City—an expense that those who are out of work because of their sickness often cannot afford.

Until the Administration finally provides the leadership needed to address this issue, we have no choice but to fund the piecemeal programs in a piecemeal fashion. The responsibility falls on us to ensure that short-term funding continues for the current programs that are helping people each and every day.

Again, we ask that you include \$283 million for medical monitoring and treatment for responders who were exposed to the toxins of Ground Zero while taking part in the rescue, recovery and clean-up efforts after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. At a minimum, we urge you to include \$50 million for these purposes. As the new majority, we must provide the leadership that the President has not yet shown to care for the heroes of 9/11. I sincerely thank you for your attention to this matter.

Sincerely,


CAROLYN B. MALONEY
Member of Congress


JERROLD NADLER
Member of Congress