



Food Safety

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February 11, 1999

Director Neal F. Lane
Assistant to the President for Science and Technology
Office of Science and Technology Policy
1600 Pennsylvania Ave, N.W.
Washington, DC 20502

Dear Director Lane:

I am writing to urge your support for the creation of a single, independent food safety agency. As co-chair of the President's Council on Food Safety, you will an opportunity to help lead the nation toward this important step when the Council reports to the President its views on recommendations contained in the Institute of Medicine, National Academy of Sciences (NAS) study *Ensuring Safe Food From Production to Consumption*.

The NAS study recommends that "Congress should establish, by statute, a unified and central framework for managing federal food safety programs, one that is headed by a single official and which has the responsibility and control of resources for all federal food safety activities...." Of the four examples of possible organizational structures suggested in the study, "many members of the committee are of the view that the most viable means of achieving these goals would be to create a single, unified agency headed by a single administrator." I agree with this conclusion.

The safety of our nation's food supply is facing tremendous pressures with regard to emerging pathogens, an aging population with a growing number of people at high risk for foodborne illnesses, broader food distribution patterns, an increasing volume of food imports, and changing consumption patterns. Currently, 12 different federal agencies and 35 different laws govern food safety and inspection functions. This results in overlapping jurisdictions and a lack of uniformity in safety and inspection standards. Without consolidation of the food safety framework, it will be difficult for the federal government to adequately and efficiently respond to these challenges.

I am pleased to see that the President, in his Fiscal Year 2000 Budget, proposes transferring the Seafood Inspection Program from the Department of Commerce to the Department of Health and Human Services. Consolidation of all food safety and inspection functions is needed for the same reasons.

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The NAS study concludes that reorganization of the federal government is required. The idea of a single, independent food safety agency has been discussed in Congress for over 20 years, and the need for it continues to increase. I plan to reintroduce legislation creating such an agency soon and hope to work with you to make it a reality.

I urge you to support the single, independent food safety agency recommendation when the Council on Food Safety reports to the President its views on the NAS study.

Thank you for your consideration in this matter.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Dick Durbin", written in a cursive style.

Richard J. Durbin
United States Senator