

April 9, 2009

The Honorable Frank R. Lautenberg, Chairman
And
The Honorable Arlen Specter, Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics and Environmental Health
Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Lautenberg and Ranking Member Specter:

We are concerned physicians, scientists, and citizens writing to you from a range of communities and organizations regarding the need to improve health protections in the United States and the broader global community. As leaders of the Senate Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics and Environmental Health of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works you have oversight responsibilities regarding our nation's efforts to protect our natural environment, and the health of people as it is affected by our environment.

In 2009 there are few people who deny that harm to human health can be caused by environmental contamination of air and water and other poisonous exposures. It is no longer a matter of "environmental enthusiasts" versus the nation's economic engine, but rather an urgent public health matter involving the prevention of thousands of illnesses and deaths each year. Exposure to hazardous chemicals poses an acute public health problem manifest in escalating rates of asthma, childhood cancer, and other serious health problems in the United States.

Your work on the Subcommittee includes oversight of the U.S. EPA, our nation's lead agency on environmental protections affecting human health. Recent Congressional hearings identified numerous ethical problems at the Agency. We are concerned that inappropriate influence by special interests could divert attention and resources from critical needs, such as timely action on hazardous chemicals, energy-related pollution, and equitable enforcement of environmental laws.

Campaign contributions have been made to all subcommittee members by companies engaged in activities that are substantially impacted by the U.S. EPA's actions (please see attached page). While such donations are entirely legal, there are legitimate concerns regarding political influence and access. We are confident that you will serve with honor and dedication in your Congressional service. We request that you regularly meet with those who are working for improved environmental health protections in order to balance special interest arguments against stronger protections. It is in our nation's best and guiding interest that diverse voices be heard on these important issues. We appreciate and applaud the fact that some Subcommittee members have welcomed a diversity of thinking on these critical issues, often taking national and global leadership roles on environmental and public health protections.

Our shared goals include insuring the safety of water, air, soil, and food supplies through careful management and protection of essential resources. We believe that you share these goals, by virtue of your participation on the Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics and Environmental Health in the US Senate. We look forward to observing your oversight and efforts to move the country forward on environmental issues of critical importance to us all, and hence to the entire world.

Respectfully submitted by the following individuals and organizations*

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Membership of the Senate Subcommittee on Superfund, Toxics and Environmental Health, Committee on Environment and Public Works

Senator

Max Baucus of Montana
Barbara Boxer of California
Christopher Bond of Missouri
Mike Crapo of Idaho
Kirsten Gillibrand of New York
James Inhofe of Oklahoma
Amy Klobuchar of Minnesota
Frank Lautenberg of New Jersey
Arlen Specter of Pennsylvania
Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island

Numerous companies that produce or use large quantities of hazardous chemicals, materials, and polluting fuels made campaign contributions to Subcommittee members during 2008, including PACs for Monsanto, Dow, Eastman Chemical, Exxon, General Electric Plastics, Occidental Petroleum, Mobil, Zeneca and many others. Associations established by companies, such as the American Chemical Council, and firms that conduct legal and public relations work on behalf of the companies also made donations. In addition, contributions to political parties are distributed to party candidates. These actions are legal, and public disclosures of contributions are reported by the federal government.

Sources:

Detailed contribution data & complete PAC titles are available at two federal government websites that were relied upon in the preparation of this letter:

Federal Election Commission Campaign Finance Reports & Data
<http://www.fec.gov/disclosure.shtml>

Senate Office of Public Records
http://www.senate.gov/legislative/Public_Disclosure/LDA_reports.htm

CC:

Senator Richard Durbin, Illinois, Co-Sponsor with Senator Arlen Specter of the Fair Elections Bill, March 2009

Senator Edward Kennedy, Massachusetts, Chairman of the Senate Committee on Health, Education, Labor and Pensions

Senator Barbara Boxer, California, Chairperson of the Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works.