



Congressman Tim Bishop

FIRST DISTRICT -- NEW YORK

NEWS RELEASE

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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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CONGRESSMAN BISHOP, SENATOR CLINTON DISCUSS PLUM ISLAND'S FUTURE WITH HOMELAND SECURITY SECRETARY CHERTOFF

Clinton, Bishop Offer Letter Requesting Plum Island Feasibility Study to DHS Chief

WASHINGTON, DC - New York Senator Hillary Rodham Clinton and Long Island Congressman Tim Bishop met yesterday with Department of Homeland Security Secretary Michael Chertoff to discuss the future of the world-renowned Plum Island Animal Disease Center and the possibility of building a new bio- and agro-defense facility, or improving upon existing facilities, on the Island.

"The future of Plum Island must be dictated by three factors-- science, national security and the health and safety of Long Island families," Bishop said. "I believe that if we make needed improvements to Plum Island, it can continue to serve a vital role in America's biodefense." Bishop added, "Our nation's food supply and the health of American families depend upon knowing whether this facility will be able to continue doing the job it does every day."

Senator Clinton and Congressman Bishop requested the meeting in response to a "requirements analysis" or fact-sheet released by DHS in August, which proposed an assessment of whether the aging facility should be renovated at its current location or transferred from New York State. Both Senator Clinton and Congressman Bishop oppose closure of the facility, but support maintaining a modernized Bio-Safety Level 3 research center studying animal and plant diseases.

Secretary Chertoff has commissioned a study for a new National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility. Senator Clinton and Congressman Bishop presented a letter to Chertoff requesting that the study include an assessment of how Plum Island can be improved to continue to conduct Level 3 research to help protect the nation's food supply. In addition, they asked for an evaluation of the costs that would be incurred in closing the facility and remediating the Plum Island site to allow for other uses.

Additionally, Senator Clinton and Congressman Bishop reminded Secretary Chertoff of assurances made by former-Secretary Tom Ridge that Plum Island would remain a Bio-Safety Level 3 facility in its current location. In a June 2003 press release DHS stated, "The island setting and biocontainment facilities of PIADC permit safe and secure research. PIADC biocontainment facilities operate at a Bio-Safety Level 3. DHS has no plans in the near or long term for a Bio-Safety Level 4 facility."

Additionally, the DHS Assistant Secretary for Legislative Affairs wrote to Senator Clinton and

Congressman Bishop as recently as 2003, stating: "We view PIADC as a unique critical national asset essential for countering intentional or unintentional introductions of foreign animal diseases into the United States."

Letter to Secretary Chertoff attached below.

October 5, 2005

The Honorable Michael Chertoff
U.S. Department of Homeland Security
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Secretary Chertoff,

As elected officials representing Long Island, we have worked hard to ensure the integrity of the research performed at the Plum Island Animal Disease Center, as well as the safety of its workforce and the surrounding community. During the transfer of Plum Island to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS), we met with Secretary Ridge, and were promised that "Bio-Safety Level 3" work would continue at Plum Island, and that DHS would keep us fully informed about developments relating to the facility. Therefore, we were very disappointed to learn of your agency's potential plans for Plum Island through a "fact sheet" we received in August.

As you know, the DHS Appropriations conference report for FY 06 provides \$23 million to study options and make plans for the proposed National Bio- and Agro- Defense Facility. We believe it is critical that this study and planning work include an assessment of how the Plum Island Animal Disease Center can be upgraded to continue to conduct "Bio-Safety Level 3" research to help protect the nation's food supply. This is in keeping with the understanding we reached with Secretary Ridge, and may be more cost-effective than building a new facility elsewhere. To the extent that other sites are examined, we believe that the study should evaluate the costs that would be incurred in closing the facility and the remediating the Plum Island site for future uses. We ask that you include these evaluations as part of the \$23 million study that DHS will undertake in the coming year.

We recognize that the Plum Island facility is aging, and that the range of new threats to our nation's food supply call for new research infrastructure and capabilities. However, we strongly question whether it makes fiscal or policy sense to abandon the existing infrastructure and capabilities at Plum Island given its strategic location. Plum Island was first established as a foreign animal disease center because of its isolation, with no other communities or buildings occupying the island. In addition, the very limited livestock population on the surrounding mainland would limit the extent or possibility of an accidental outbreak of a very contagious and economically devastating disease like foot-and-mouth disease. With that in mind, Congress passed a law that mandated that active foot-and-mouth disease could only be researched and stored on an island, resulting in the establishment of the Plum Island Animal Disease Center.

For all of these reasons, we think that Plum Island can and should continue to play a strong role in our defense against agro-terrorism, and we urge you to utilize the funding provided in the FY 2006 conference report to that end.

Hillary Rodham Clinton
U.S. Senate

Tim Bishop
U.S. House of Representatives

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