

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

May 22, 2000

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VIA Facsimile: (202) 334-1684, (202) 334-1329, (202) 334-2419, (202) 334-3584

RE: Follow up to Staff Briefing on NAS Study on Musculoskeletal Disorders and the Workplace; Award No. HHS-100-99-0001

Dear Drs. Colglazier, Pope, Wigdor, and Mr. Jensen:

Thank you for briefing our respective staff members on April 5 regarding NAS' approach to the study on Musculoskeletal Disorders in the Workplace. The discussions were informative and have helped us understand more clearly the scope, depth and methodology of the study.

We appreciate your clarification of the role that the seven questions posed by Congress will play and your assurances that these will be answered within the final report. As you know, S. 1070 and H.R. 987 call for OSHA to wait for the results of this study before moving forward with their ergonomics regulation. It is imperative that the study being conducted by NAS address the seven questions posed by Congress.

You also indicated that the literature review which represents the core of the study has, to some extent, been “commissioned” from a variety of experts from around the globe that were chosen by the panel members. We remain concerned about questions of bias and professional history with respect to these reviewers. In the same way as those who serve on the panel are screened for their bias, we believe that these reviewers should also have been screened to alert the panel to any bias that may exist. Merely because they are doing the basic research does not mean that their biases would not be important or could shape the final results of the study. Indeed, it is precisely at that level where bias can have the most profound and undiscovered impact. Thus, not screening these reviewers for bias, or asking them to disclose previous positions appears to be a potential flaw in this study and could undermine its ultimate credibility and usefulness.

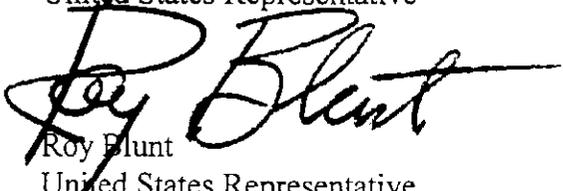
Furthermore, it is our understanding that NAS will not provide to Congress the contents of the bias disclosures of the panel members. We would appreciate a more detailed explanation of this policy as it would seem natural for disclosures of this nature to be available to the requestors and funders of this study. In addition, once a potential member has disclosed a potential source of bias, who decides whether it is material and should prohibit that person from serving on the panel? Accordingly, we renew our request to review these disclosures and we wish to do this by June 2

Similarly, the inability to review the criteria by which the studies are being evaluated leaves many questions unanswered. The value of this study will be largely determined by the criteria used to evaluate the literature. There are recognized standards and methodologies for evaluating scientific studies and it is imperative that NAS follow these in this effort.

Please respond to these requests by June 2 with an indication of how we can review the bias disclosure forms as well as the criteria being used to evaluate the studies. In addition, we look forward to receiving updates on your progress with the study. Thank you for your willingness to keep us informed on the progress of the panel.



Henry Bonilla
United States Representative



Roy Blunt
United States Representative

Sincerely,



Christopher S. “Kit” Bond
United States Senator