

United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

February 23, 2004

The Honorable Donald L. Evans
Secretary of Commerce
Room 5854
14th Street & Constitution Avenue, NW
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Evans:

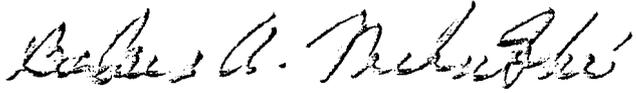
We are writing to express our strong opposition to any attempt to privatize the Fire Protection Group (FPG) at the National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). We believe that emergency response at sensitive government agencies like NIST should not be privatized, and we ask you to immediately stop the A-76 study of the FPG.

We are concerned that the Commerce Department is planning to contract out positions at NIST without regard to safety of NIST employees or residents in the surrounding community. In a similar case last year, the National Institutes of Health (NIH) decided to drop plans to study its Fire Department for privatization out of concern for the security and safety of the NIH community. Like NIH, the NIST campus in Gaithersburg, Maryland houses a research grade nuclear reactor and laboratories that contain chemicals and other hazardous materials. The men and women of the FPG are uniquely trained to prevent and respond to not only fires, but all emergencies, including HAZMAT incidents. In addition, the FPG provides significant support to Montgomery County's fire and emergency response capability.

It has already been established that the FPG provides crucial services to NIST. Two extensive and costly management studies in 1996 and 2000 concluded that the FPG is necessary and cost effective. Conducting a third study would not only be a waste of time and money, but also would be devastating to the morale of the dedicated employees who perform this critical job.

We urge you to reconsider your decision to conduct a public-private competition for the NIST Fire Department. Thank you for your consideration of this matter. We look forward to your timely response.

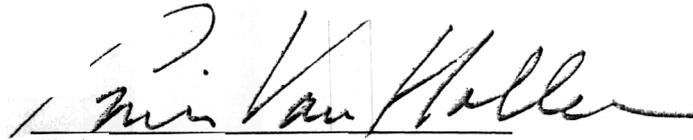
Sincerely,



Barbara A. Mikulski
United States Senator



Paul S. Sarbanes
United States Senator



Chris Van Hollen
United States Representative