United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510

July 10, 2008

Secretary Michael Leavitt
Secretary of Health and Human Services
U.S. Department of Health and Human Services
200 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20201

Dear Secretary Leavitt,

We are greatly disappointed to learn that you are relieving Dr. John Howard of his important responsibilities advocating for the sick and injured World Trade Center (WTC) workers.

Throughout this process, the response, information-sharing and resources from your administration to Director Howard have been inadequate. He was challenged with the difficult, but crucial, task of overseeing the World Trade Center Medical Monitoring and Treatment program, which provides federally-funded health care for 9/11 first responders and others exposed to Ground Zero toxins. A pioneer in health and safety, Dr. Howard has received high praise for his efforts working on behalf of the heroes of 9/11, and clearly deserves to be reappointed not removed from office.

September 11th was a tragedy to which public-spirited Americans responded by risking their own personal health and welfare to save others. There is simply no reason to have a vacancy at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health at a time when 9/11 workers need its help and expertise the most. This perceived desertion undermines the trust these workers deserve to have that their government is looking out for their best interests.

Dr. Howard has been an outstanding director and public servant and deserves our full support and confidence. You assured us in February 2006 that you are "committed to providing appropriate, compassionate and timely support to those who were affected by WTC exposures following the 9/11/ attack." We are hard pressed to understand this commitment in light of Dr. Howard's not being reappointed and urge you to reconsider this ill-conceived decision.

Sincerely,

ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senator

FRANK LAUTENBERG
United States Senator