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News - Friday, February 7, 2003

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Musgrave takes up fight for CDC lab

By **DAVID PERSONS**
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U.S. Rep. Marilyn Musgrave has taken up the fight for funding for a new Centers for Disease Control research lab in Fort Collins.

As lawmakers begin forming a spending plan for 2003, Musgrave sent a letter Thursday seeking funding for the replacement of the aging research lab.

An \$80 million plan to replace and expand the 35-year-old CDC facility, where research on some of the world's most deadly diseases is done, was approved a year ago, and \$8 million was provided to begin design work.

However, the remaining \$72 million to build and equip the laboratory has yet to be appropriated.

A current Senate bill calls for \$20 million for the project in the 2003 budget, but Musgrave, a Colorado Republican, and other state officials would like to see the full amount funded and not have the balance in question.

Aware that Senate and House members now are meeting to approve appropriations for the 2003 budget, Musgrave sent the letter to House Appropriations Committee chairman Don Young and ranking member David Obey. The letter also was signed by state Reps. Bob Beauprez, Tom Tancredo, Scott McInnis, Mark Udall and Joel Hefley.

Fast facts

- The current CDC building was constructed in 1967 to house the CDC's vector-borne infectious diseases lab.
- It was designed to accommodate 50 employees, but 170 currently work there.
- Among the diseases studied at the facility are West Nile virus, plague, anthrax, Lyme disease, yellow fever and several types of encephalitis.



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In the letter, Musgrave stated: "The Centers for Disease Control in Fort Collins plays a vital role in protecting Americans from vector-borne infectious diseases. Their research into threats such as anthrax, plague and the West Nile virus will help the U.S. defend itself in the war on terrorism."

In the letter, Musgrave said the current CDC facility in Fort Collins "is in extremely poor condition and cannot meet the demands we place on CDC in these critical days of history. We rely on CDC to conduct valuable research and develop technology to protect our nation's leaders, military men and women and civilians from the threat of infectious disease."

If \$20 million ends up the final amount appropriated for the CDC project in 2003, CDC officials in Atlanta say they can live with that for the moment.

"If that appropriation is outlayed for this fiscal year, our plan is to sign a (construction) contract and start work," said William Gimson, acting deputy director for program management at CDC headquarters in Atlanta.

But Gimson said he's not giving up on the idea that House members might put more money into the appropriations bill, perhaps all of it.

"It's a moving landscape," Gimson said of the 2003 budget.

The 2004 budget is another story.

If President Bush's proposed budget passes, the CDC won't get enough new funding next year to keep up with inflation.

In his fiscal year 2004 budget, released Monday, Bush is proposing to increase the entire CDC budget by 1 percent -- from \$6.48 billion to \$6.54 billion.

The Fort Collins research lab was built in 1967 to accommodate about 50 people. Today, more than 170 people work there.

Its primary role is preparing for potential bioterrorism agents such as plague, tularemia and Venezuelan equine encephalitis.

Two years ago, former U.S. Rep. Bob Schaffer -- whose seat Musgrave was elected to fill in November -- U.S. Sen. Wayne Allard, R-Colo., and U.S. Rep. Diane DeGette, D-Colo., toured the facility and found the lab was overcrowded and in poor condition with weeds growing up through the floors.

In November 2001, Schaffer and Allard wrote a letter to the Senate and House Appropriations Committee requesting immediate funding to

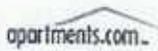
strengthen and enhance security at the site in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.

Plans then were approved to replace the facility with a new, 31,000-square-foot, three-story structure located adjacent to its current site on the Colorado State University Foothills Campus, west of Overland Trail between Mulberry and Elizabeth streets.

Gannett News Service writer Faith Bremner contributed to this report.

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