

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

October 19, 2009

The Honorable Gary Locke  
Secretary  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave NW  
Washington, DC 20230

The Honorable Jane Lubchenco  
Under Secretary for Oceans and Atmosphere  
Department of Commerce  
1401 Constitution Ave NW, Room 5128  
Washington, DC 20230

Dear Secretary Locke and Under Secretary Lubchenco:

As expressed in previous letters, we are troubled by NOAA's recent decision to relocate the Marine Operations Center-Pacific (MOC-P) outside of its long-standing home in the Puget Sound. While the Government Accountability Office (GAO) continues to examine whether the competition for this facility was fair, we also continue to have larger policy concerns outside the scope of GAO's review. One particular concern we have is whether this move will exacerbate NOAA's ongoing challenges hiring and retaining qualified mariners and engineers.

In an interview printed in the publication "The Master, Mate & Pilot" in January of this year, the Director of NOAA Marine and Aviation Operations Centers stated, "the reality is that we never have enough mariners. This is especially true for engineers but also, to a lesser extent, for deck officers. Employee retention is a critical challenge for us."

It seems striking to us that NOAA's decision to relocate Marine Operations Center-Pacific to Newport, Oregon will significantly exacerbate this problem. Rather than helping NOAA cope with its ongoing struggle hiring and retaining mariners, moving to Newport will almost certainly make this problem worse. Relocating operations from the Puget Sound – a major maritime hub and large population center – to a relatively small and remote community will add another significant hurdle to the already-challenging task of hiring and retaining qualified mariners and engineers for NOAA's fleet. With a 20-year lease at stake, locating NOAA's MOC-P in Newport will ensure that NOAA has to struggle with the legacy and costs of this additional challenge for many years.

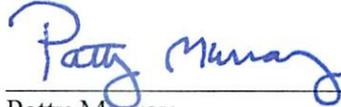
Our offices have also heard that a move to Newport will likely cause a significant number of MOC-P mariner and engineer employees to end their employment with NOAA. This sign does not bode well for NOAA's ability to cope with its hiring problem if MOC-P is located in Newport.

We question whether this particular issue and its potential long-term costs were sufficiently analyzed as a part of the MOC-P long-term lease award process. We request that you take a fresh look at this challenge and conduct a formal independent review of its implications in the context of whether moving NOAA's Marine Operations Center-Pacific to Newport, Oregon is truly a wise decision for NOAA, its employees, and its scientific missions.

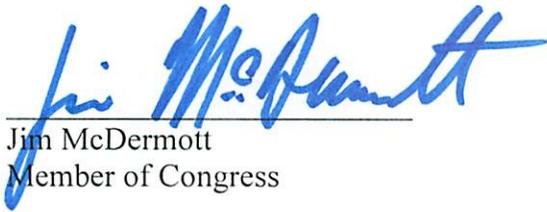
Respectfully,



Maria Cantwell  
United States Senator  
Chair, Subcommittee on Oceans, Atmosphere,  
Fisheries and Coast Guard



Patty Murray  
United States Senator



Jim McDermott  
Member of Congress



Jay Inslee  
Member of Congress



Brian Baird  
Member of Congress



Rick Larsen  
Member of Congress



Dave Reichert  
Member of Congress