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United States Senate

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March 22, 2018

The Honorable Scott Pruitt
Administrator
U.S. Environmental Protection Agency
1200 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20460

Dear Administrator Pruitt:

I write today in regards to an announcement made on February 6, 2018 by the Director of the National Exposure Research Laboratory within the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) Office of Research and Development informing employees of the decision to close its Las Vegas laboratory, located within leased space at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV), at the end of September 2018, according to an email sent to staff.

Purportedly, the original plan had been to consolidate the laboratory's workspace after the UNLV lease expired in September 2020. This announcement would move up the plan by two years.

In addition, the EPA's Office of Administration and Resources Management (OARM), Las Vegas Human Resources Shared Service Center was also announced for closure. Reportedly, the human resources group, which occupies leased space in a neighboring building complex, had no advance knowledge their office would be closed until the announcement was made.

Recent news accounts on the announced closures say the decision leaves more than 50 employees in Nevada weighing relocation, retirement, or resignation.[1] Additional information indicates that 28 contractors would also be affected by the closures. Some of the scientists employed at the EPA laboratory are also adjunct professors at UNLV, leaving their relationship with the university in question.

As you are well aware, several of my constituents now have many life-changing decisions to make in a short timeframe that not only effects them, but their families, other professional commitments, as well as the outcome of their ongoing research efforts. I urge you to give them the full support of your agency, and help provide them with certainty and specificity by answering the following questions:

[1] https://federalnewsradio.com/agency-oversight/2018/02/epa-tells-las-vegas-employees-to-relocate-retire-or-resign/

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1. What was the evaluation used to determine the closure for this particular laboratory facility?

2. Why was the closure decision expedited to September 2018, rather than 2020?

3. What will happen to the research currently being done at this facility?

4. How will the agency accommodate employees that are unable to relocate? Will telework options be available to these employees?

5. What assistance is being provided to impacted employees?

6. What is the current status of the Office of Air and Radiation's Radiation and Indoor Environments National Laboratory which resides in a neighboring facility? Is this facility also under consideration for closure?

7. Section 104(e) of the Clean Water Act requires the EPA Administrator to establish, equip, and maintain field laboratory a research facility specifically in the "southwestern area" of the United States "for the conduct of research, investigations, experiments, field demonstrations and studies, and training relating to the prevention, reduction and elimination of pollution." Furthermore, each facility shall be "located near institutions of higher learning in which graduate training in such research might be carried out." What EPA facility in the southwest otherwise fits this criteria?

Thank you for your consideration of these matters of importance to my constituents. I kindly request a response to my inquiries by Thursday, April 12, 2018.

Sincerely,

Catherine Cortez Masto
United States Senator