



Economic Affairs Interim Committee

63rd Montana Legislature

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Sept. 12, 2014

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Sen. Llew Jones, presiding officer
Legislative Finance Committee

Dear Sen. Jones:

The Economic Affairs Interim Committee is sending this letter to the Legislative Finance Committee in the hope that the Finance Committee and its membership who are expected to serve on the House Appropriations and Senate Finance and Claims Committees in the 2015 Legislature will place on their radar the following concerns related to the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and the Wildlife Laboratory located on the Montana State University campus in Bozeman:

- a need for both the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and the Wildlife Laboratory. A legislative determination of "need" may be an important policy discussion that ought to take place before discussion of long-range building plans. For its part, the Economic Affairs Interim Committee saw merit in having a Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory, which was the subject of several separate interim meetings. There was a sense that the lab serves a public purpose and that loss of the lab may harm the public, and particularly the livestock industry, because testing out-of-state might not be carried out in a timely, safe manner. Although tests now sent to the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory could be sent to out-of-state laboratories (and in some cases are), the in-state Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory provides a time-sensitive, first line of defense against animal diseases that impact the livestock industry and a first alert for zoonotic diseases, like avian influenza, that have the ability to impact human health. The Wildlife Laboratory is included in the request for consideration because of efficiencies in potentially combining the laboratories. Based on a tour made available to members of the Economic Affairs Interim Committee, the Wildlife Laboratory has a problematic task of doing forensic work on the difficult-to-transport, sometimes mangled carcasses of wildlife like grizzlies, wolves, eagles, and other animals to determine whether laws have been broken in the deaths and whether the deaths were from diseases that have the potential to lead to epidemics, like chronic-wasting disease.
- unless action is taken in the near future, the long-term potential is slim for either the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory or the Wildlife Laboratory being located on the Montana State University-Bozeman campus. The building that houses the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory is expected to be demolished under MSU's long-range campus

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development plans. The Wildlife Laboratory is 8 years into a 20-year lease, with no assurance of remaining at the same site past that time.

For these reasons, the Economic Affairs Interim Committee asks that the Legislative Finance Committee and future members of the Long-Range Building Subcommittee consider further researching a combination of these two laboratories either in the MSU-Bozeman vicinity or affiliated with a livestock or wildlife educational facility elsewhere. Estimates by the Architecture and Engineering Division of the Department of Administration have put the cost of a combined Veterinary Diagnostic and Wildlife Laboratory at \$13,544,060 without including land acquisition and site improvement costs.

In summation, this request builds on a 2009-2010 study, SJR 14, by the Economic Affairs Interim Committee, which has within its monitoring jurisdiction the Department of Livestock and its divisions, including the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory located on the Montana State University campus in Bozeman. That study, which also looked at other labs in the Bozeman area, was designed, in part, to determine whether a new laboratory--possibly combined with other state-run laboratories--might resolve building problems that at the time were impacting the veterinary laboratory's continued accreditation through the American Association of Veterinary Laboratory Diagnosticians. The building problems continue. It is the hope of the Economic Affairs Interim Committee that the 2015 Legislature continue research into the feasibility of retaining both the Veterinary Diagnostic Laboratory and the Wildlife Laboratory in a combined facility that could achieve efficiencies not currently available. The discussion is one worth having and worth having by more than one legislative committee.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

on behalf of the Economic Affairs Interim Committee