

Board has deferred to the Mayor and the Council and they have to come up with a plan on how they are going to close this damn place down.”

On May 9, Norton’s office sent a memo, marked “confidential,” to her Congressional colleagues “Re: D.C. General Hospital is a D.C. Issue and is Not Before the Congress. . . . Tomorrow, May 10, a mass march and lobby day have been scheduled. There may be more such activity in the weeks ahead. . . . [In] many of the groups who have come to Congresswoman Norton’s office, the majority of the participants have been followers of Lyndon LaRouche, and the publicity and events are being coordinated by LaRouche and the Schiller Institute, a LaRouche front. . . .”

In August, Sen. Mary Landrieu (D-La.), who had earlier insisted that she would act on D.C. General only after consultation with Norton, moved to insert a paragraph into the 2001 Supplemental Appropriations bill: “This section ratifies and approves, and gives the full force of federal law to the action of the District of Columbia Financial Responsibility and Management Authority on April 30, 2001 [to shutdown D.C. General].” The cat was out of the bag, Norton had lied, and blindsided her colleagues.

The significance of Waters’ apology should be seen in light of the above; but also, in the context of the changed post-Sept. 11 environment, and LaRouche’s role in exposing the coup-in-progress against the Bush Administration as of that date. Senator Daschle must now, for the General Welfare of the people of the United States, reverse himself. He should act, perhaps against the wishes of Senate Minority Leader Trent Lott (R-Miss.) et al., to defend the health of U.S. citizens, starting with restoring and expanding D.C. General’s public health functions.

Why Postal Workers Died: No Public Health Defense

by Lynne Speed and Edward Spannaus

The chronology of events leading up to the deaths of two Washington, D.C. postal workers from pulmonary anthrax on Oct. 21-22, stands as a stinging indictment of the bureaucratic, axiomatically-flawed apparatus which continues to leave the nation unprepared even after the events of Sept. 11 and the subsequent anthrax attacks.

Especially dramatic is the transcript of the 911 phone call made by postal worker Thomas L. Morris, Jr., early in the morning of Oct. 21. In that call, Morris said he suspected that he had been exposed to anthrax a week earlier, on Oct. 13, when an envelope with powder in it was found at the Brentwood processing center; but that postal officials had never let him know if it was anthrax or not. Morris saw his own doctor at his local Kaiser-Permanente HMO center in suburban Prince

Georges County on Oct. 18, but the doctor only prescribed Tylenol. After his 911 call, Morris was taken to Greater Southeast Community Hospital, where he died later that day.

The unnecessary deaths of these workers, both misdiagnosed by private, for-profit health-care providers, in the absence of a competent public-health system, underscores the urgency of citizens acting on 2004 Presidential precandidate Lyndon LaRouche’s Oct. 28 call to “Build a National Defense Against Germ Warfare” (*EIR*, Nov. 9).

Morris and his co-worker John Curseen became, tragically, like so many others, victims of the mass murder policy known as “shareholder values,” which in the last quarter-century has overridden the Constitutional principle of the “general welfare” and “common good.” The destructive doctrine of “saving money,” rather than “saving lives,” has now placed in jeopardy the lives of every American.

In this context, LaRouche has stated that restoring D.C. General Hospital in the nation’s capital is indispensable and obvious, but it is not sufficient. What is required is an immediate full war-time mobilization to restore the national defense protection provided by public and related measures of sanitation. This means rebuilding our nation’s infrastructure, including safe water, plentiful and affordable supplies of energy, improved public transportation, and public health institutions, which all have been dismantled, step by step, over the past three recent decades, under the destructive dogmas of “privatization,” “deregulation,” and “free trade.”

Chronology

Saturday, Oct. 13: Thomas L. Morris, Jr. and a few other postal workers at the Brentwood Post Office notice, and bring to the attention of supervisors, a suspicious letter, leaking white powder, which they fear might contain anthrax. This is two days before the anthrax letter is received in the office of Sen. Tom Daschle! The suspicious letter is set aside and sent to the FBI for testing (it was later reported to test negative, but the results were never provided to the postal workers, nor was a further investigation conducted).

Monday, Oct. 15: Immediately after the Daschle letter is discovered, testing and treatment begins at Congress for 4,000 Congressional staffers and others who work in the buildings. But for the next five days, there is *no testing or treatment* of the postal workers at the Brentwood facility, through which the Daschle letter was processed. There are, however, a series of press conferences, which include top Federal and, later, District of Columbia officials. *Not one* of them proposes the type of emergency measures which would have been required to protect the lives of the postal workers.

Tuesday-Wednesday, Oct. 16-17: On Tuesday, Brentwood postal workers Morris and Curseen begin feeling sick; the next day, postal worker Leroy Richmond is ill.

Thursday, Oct. 18: At a press conference at the Brentwood facility, postal workers are told that there is no need for them to be tested. The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) also says that no environmental testing at Brentwood is needed.

Curseen and Morris begin to exhibit worsening symptoms. Morris goes to his HMO, and complains of trouble breathing, muscle pain, headaches, and tightness in the chest. Even though health officials have been warning for weeks that anthrax symptoms are initially similar to those of the flu, the doctor gives him Tylenol, not the powerful antibiotic Cipro.

Friday, Oct. 19: Federal officials state at a Capitol news conference that the only areas of potential exposure to anthrax are the fifth and sixth floors of the Hart Senate Office Building, southeast quadrant. All individuals that have been in that area are given a 60-day course of Cipro. CDC recommends no further testing. D.C. Deputy Health Director Larry Siegel states that there is no need for mass testing beyond the zone in the Hart Building, adding, "This mass need for testing that is being requested in D.C. hospitals and clinics and doctors' offices in the area . . . is not necessary." Meanwhile, postal worker Richmond is admitted to Inova Fairfax Hospital, with flu-like symptoms, and doctors begin aggressively treating him with antibiotics Cipro and Clindmycin.

Saturday, Oct. 20: Postal worker Curseen faints in church; but because postal workers were told they were safe, he thinks it is nothing serious, and insists on going to work that evening.

Sunday, Oct. 21: At approximately 2:00 a.m., Curseen goes to the emergency room at Southern Maryland Hospital Center (a private, for-profit hospital), where doctors diagnose him with stomach flu and send him home. Then, at 4:39 a.m., Morris calls 911, saying that he believes he may have been exposed to anthrax. Morris is admitted to Greater Southeast Community Hospital (the private facility that took over D.C. General Hospital), at 5:55 a.m., and he dies that evening at about 9:00 p.m.

A second Brentwood postal worker is admitted to Inova Fairfax Hospital; and the first one, Leroy Richmond, is diagnosed with pulmonary anthrax. At that point, CDC and D.C. and Maryland health officials finally decide that workers from Brentwood and BWI postal facilities should be tested and given prophylactic treatment. Hundreds of postal workers flock to the D.C. Health Department for testing; they are furious that they were not tested earlier, when all the Capitol Hill staffers were tested.

Mayor Anthony Williams and D.C. Health Director Ivan Walks hold a press conference on Sunday afternoon, asking all postal workers to report to D.C. General on Monday for testing and treatment. The tragic irony of this scene is lost on few people familiar with the treacherous role of Williams and Walks—and that of Delegate Eleanor Holmes Norton—in privatizing and dismantling D.C. General, just a few months ago. The hospital was effectively closed on July 14, and 1,800 dedicated staff were laid off, the Level One Trauma Center was terminated, and its state-of-the-art microbiology lab and bio-chemical decontamination unit were shut down. One of the top bio-terrorist response centers in the country was deliberately destroyed.

Monday, Oct. 22: Curseen collapses at home, is taken by ambulance back to Southern Maryland Hospital Center, and dies six hours later. Williams and Walks hold a 1:00 p.m. press conference, in front of the shell of D.C. General, to announce that two postal workers are confirmed to have pulmonary anthrax, and that two others have died. D.C. officials announce later they will begin giving antibiotics to all postal workers in neighborhood post offices, as well as those at Brentwood. Meanwhile, chaos reigns inside the no longer functional D.C. General, where there is virtually no staff or equipment. Testing is being done by CDC personnel. School nurses are called in to swab noses and dispense antibiotics. Later that day, as a result of the confusion and lack of personnel, all testing of postal workers is halted and antibiotics are simply dispensed. Upset postal workers storm the D.C. General Emergency Room, demanding testing, impossible due to lack of staff and equipment.

Over the next several days as many as 10,000 postal workers and others visit the defunct D.C. General to receive antibiotics. The two Brentwood postal workers who were admitted to Inova Fairfax Hospital and aggressively treated with antibiotics, slowly recover, and are eventually discharged.

A 'Model' Disaster

In the few weeks following these events, Mayor Williams, Ivan Walks, CDC and other Federal officials have hailed these developments as a "model" for local and Federal cooperation in a crisis. But this "model" is clearly a disaster, precisely as described by LaRouche in his Oct. 28 statement: "Homeland defense has been launched with the usual snafu. It came to the surface as a suddenly improvised new agency, without adequate measures to integrate the effort with the work of other, pre-existing agencies operating in the same general area of responsibility. So far, even in dealing with the anthrax problems in the Washington, D.C. area, citizens are literally being killed by 'red tape.'" It's time to join LaRouche in demanding: "Gentlemen: get your act together quickly. Bring the snafu quickly to an end."

Gloria DeFreece, president of the Retirees Division of the National Capital and Southern Maryland Local of the Postal Workers Union, told a Nov. 7 meeting of the Coalition To Restore D.C. General Hospital: "If you take a letter, and it goes to the Capitol, and you find out it's got anthrax on it, where does the letter come from? It came from the post office. If any of you have ever worked in a post office during a Christmas time, any other time, well—I'll show you something. You have a ledge, along here could be a ledge. And the mail is in a big tub. You take the mail out, you squeeze it together like this. What's going to happen to the mail when you put it here? It goes together. The air flow goes out. That's how the anthrax got all over the building. Anybody with common sense would tell you, if you find anthrax in this building down here, and it came from that building down there, go down there too!"