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COPY

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Thomas A. Daschle
Senate Minority Leader
SH-317 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510-4103
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Dear Senator Daschle:

I am writing to express my concern about the comprehensive Regulatory Reform Act of 1995. Used wisely, risk assessment, comparative risk analysis, cost-effectiveness analysis, and cost-benefit analysis can provide useful information to decision-makers on issues affecting health, safety, and the environment. I have long been a strenuous advocate of the systematic use of such tools. However, I would caution against a peremptory mandate for the routine use of such tools in environmental regulation until we gain greater knowledge and experience.

Specifically, in many cases language entailing the "best estimate" of risk or the "most plausible level" of risk overreaches our current level of scientific understanding. Of course, I support legislation intended to improve the scientific basis for and transparency of risk assessments. But that goal is contradicted by reducing funding for scientific research that addresses the biological bases of risk assessments. Likewise, substantial support (and time) is needed for research and training on risk assessment techniques - expanding the number and sophistication of risk assessments will require additional training of practitioners. In addition, while I agree that peer review is an important quality assurance mechanism, peer reviewers without conflicts of interest and with sufficient knowledge are a limited resource; peer review programs should be conducted with an eye to reasonable feasibility, within agency resource constraints and commensurate with the level of scientific importance and regulatory impact.

Regulatory decisions may be greatly improved by good risk assessments, but good risk assessments alone do not ensure good regulatory decisions. Risk assessment is not an end in itself: it should be an adjunct to the primary goal of safeguarding public health and the environment.

Please feel free to contact me if you would like more detailed comments on the draft regulatory reform legislation.

Yours sincerely,

Joshua Lederberg
(Member, Risk Assessment and Management Commission)

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