

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

April 1, 2015

The Honorable John Hoeven
Chairman
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, District of Columbia 20510

The Honorable Jeanne Shaheen
Ranking Member
Subcommittee on Homeland Security
Senate Committee on Appropriations
Washington, District of Columbia 20510

Dear Chairman Hoeven and Ranking Member Shaheen:

As senators from the Long Island Sound region, we remain deeply concerned about the effects of a forced sale and development of Plum Island on the landscape and ecological value of the area. As explained further below, the rationale for selling the Island to the highest bidder no longer makes economic sense, and we respectfully request the Committee work with us in providing the General Services Administration (GSA) with the flexibility it needs to transfer the Island to another federal agency such as the U.S. National Park Service (NPS) or the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS).

The environmental significance of the Plum Island area cannot be overstated. The 840-acre Plum Island and adjacent Great Gull and Little Gull Islands were identified for protection in 2006 by the federally created Long Island Sound Stewardship Initiative, which singled them out for their “exemplary” ecological value. The final Environmental Impact Statement documents the vast number of species that may be impacted by possible development scenarios, including at least two endangered species – the piping plover and the roseate tern. In addition, development on Plum Island may affect the endangered Atlantic Ridley Sea Turtle and three other New York State-listed endangered or threatened species.

As you know, current federal law requires the GSA to sell the Island.^[1] We strongly believe that the GSA should proceed with its longstanding existing process to dispose of excess federal personal property, through which it would allow any interested federal agency to take transfer of the Island. We also strongly believe that either the NPS or the FWS would be interested in taking possession if given the opportunity. However, Congress must first give these agencies the option to determine if this is even feasible. In addition, we stand ready to help any federal agency that commits to preserving the Island to identify a private partnership in order to provide some of the resources necessary for ongoing oversight and maintenance of the property. Below, we have provided draft legislative language that we would like included in the FY16 homeland security appropriations bill:

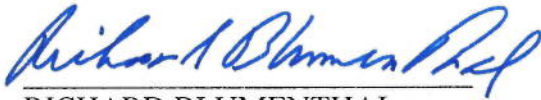
^[1] See Sec. 538 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2012 (P.L. 112-74).

(a) Repeal of Requirement in Public Law 112-74- Section 538 of the Department of Homeland Security Appropriations Act, 2012 (6 U.S.C. 190 note; division D of Public Law 112-74) is repealed.

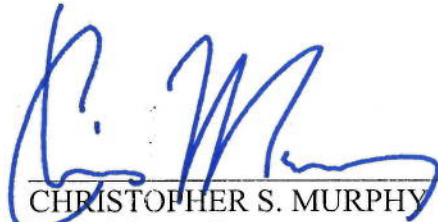
The original intent of the sale was to offset some of the cost of building the National Bio- and Agro-Defense Facility (NBAF) in Manhattan, Kansas and remediating the Island. The estimated \$32.85 million^[2] that the federal government would receive from any sale pales in comparison to the overall cost of the state-of-the-art Kansas facility. And while millions of dollars will be required to remediate the Island, we believe its environmental value is priceless and that selling it does more harm than good. From personal visits, photos and conversations with experts, we know that the Island is a critical habitat and a pristine landscape that must be protected in perpetuity.

The staff contact for this letter is ej_toppin@blumenthal.senate.gov (4-5792). Thank you for your attention to this important issue in our region.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



CHRISTOPHER S. MURPHY
United States Senate



CHARLES E. SCHUMER
United States Senate



KIRSTEN GILLIBRAND
United States Senate

^[2] The Nature Conservancy commissioned appraisal completed in June 2014 by a New York state certified appraiser familiar with eastern Long Island.