



Officials push for Butner facility

BY WILLIAM F. WEST, The Herald-Sun
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CREEDMOOR -- Federal, state and local representatives on Tuesday night were putting as much political clout as possible behind urging the federal government to locate a proposed \$450 million National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility in Butner.

U.S. Sen. Richard Burr, R-N.C., and U.S. Reps. David Price and Brad Miller, both Tar Heel Democrats, cited the proximity to intellectual firepower -- namely Research Triangle Park and nearby world-class universities -- as well as the state's economic vitality -- in arguing that the southern Granville County town should be the home of the germ-fighting lab.

Research at the 500,000-square foot, high-security site would be designed to protect American agriculture, the food supply and public health from a bioterror attack involving foreign animal diseases.

Burr, in addressing concerns about such a facility's impact on the quality of life, said, "If I thought for a minute as a representative from this state that that was in jeopardy, quite frankly I'd probably be here speaking in opposition."

The lawmakers were speaking at a hearing at South Granville High School in Creedmoor. The session started at 7 p.m. and the feedback process was expected to continue well through the night, with some 100 people signed up to speak for a maximum of three minutes each.

Some did express opposition during a question-and-answer phase at the start of the gathering.

Brendan Meyer, an auto body specialist, turned and rhetorically asked experts on hand, "I was just curious how much you get paid to push all this [bull] down our throats?" Meyer's question was greeted with whoops, cheers and applause from many in the audience.

But, the focus eventually shifted to the federal, state and local leaders.

Price, who is from Chapel Hill and whose district includes Durham, is chairman of the House Appropriations Subcommittee on Homeland Security, the department that will select the site.

Of the facility, Price said, "I am convinced that it will be a good thing for our country and also a good thing for North Carolina ...

"We must secure our nation's food supply, we must protect our livestock -- and potentially human beings -- from pandemic diseases, whether those diseases are introduced by natural means or by those who might wish us harm."

"There's no location in the country, I believe, that can boast the combined assets of this location," Price said.

Miller, of Raleigh, represents most of Granville County and is chairman of the House Science and Technology Subcommittee on Investigations and Oversight.

Miller said he decided to support the project after talking with local, state and university leaders.

"I wanted all them to go into this with their eyes wide open and to look carefully at what would be involved at this facility here," Miller said. "They are convinced that this facility will be operating safely and securely -- and I think so, too."

Also speaking in favor of the project were state Agriculture Commissioner Steve Troxler, state Sen. Doug Berger, D-Franklin, whose district includes Granville County, and state Rep. Jim Crawford, D-Granville.

North Carolina has remained in contention for the facility since the federal government in July narrowed the list of possible locations to Butner, San Antonio, Texas, Athens, Ga., Manhattan, Kan., and a town near Jackson, Miss.

The winner should be announced by October 2008 with the lab scheduled to begin operations by 2014.

The facility will replace an aging, smaller lab at Plum Island, N.Y., where security lapses after the 2001 terrorist attacks drew scrutiny from Congress and government investigators.

A federal official did note on Tuesday that Plum Island remained an alternative site, with the existing facility to be decommissioned.

Links related to this article:

Information on the Bio And Agro-Defense Lab: www.dhs.gov/xres/labs/editorial_0762.shtm

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