

Congress of the United States

Washington, DC 20515

September 27, 2002

The Honorable John P. Walters
Director
Office of National Drug Control Policy
750 17th Street NW
Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Director Walters:

We are writing in response to your decision to designate four Oregon counties (Clackamas, Douglas, Multnomah, and Washington counties) as High Intensity Drug Trafficking Areas (HIDTAs).

As lawmakers who share your passion for eliminating the threat posed to our children and communities by the scourge of drugs, we welcome this added federal investment to help reduce the manufacture, distribution and use of illegal drugs in Oregon. However, we are concerned about the failure to similarly designate Umatilla County, a major hub of methamphetamine and marijuana production in eastern Oregon.

If HIDTA designations were made solely on the basis of the severity of a county's drug problem relative to others in the state, Umatilla County would rank among the highest in priority. During 2001, Umatilla County experienced more clandestine methamphetamine laboratory seizures (40) than either Douglas or Clackamas counties, which had 28 and 10 seizures, respectively. While Umatilla County experienced fewer meth lab busts than Multnomah and Washington counties, both counties are home to significantly larger numbers of people – Multnomah County has over 9 times the population of Umatilla County and Washington County has over 6 times its population.

Likewise, in 2002, Umatilla County has experienced more meth lab seizures (26) than either Clackamas, Douglas, or Washington counties, which have seen 10, 6, and 25 seizures, respectively. Yet Umatilla County remains undesignated as a HIDTA, while these three counties are set to receive a major boost in federal law enforcement funding.

Perhaps most striking are the figures that represent the ratio of the populations of each of the newly designated counties to the number of meth lab busts. In 2001, there was one meth laboratory seized for every 1,772 residents of Umatilla County. Contrasted against the ratio of seizures to citizens in the new HIDTA counties – Clackamas County (1:34,515); Douglas County (1:3,489); Multnomah County (1:8,126); and Washington County (1:7,726) – the relative severity of the Umatilla County meth problem is apparent. If Multnomah County suffered the same lab seizure-to-citizen ratio as Umatilla County, Multnomah County would have seized 376 meth labs in 2001.

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In addition to the prevalence of meth production, Umatilla County is home to a worrisome level of marijuana cultivation. For example, on May 28, 2002, local law enforcement officers seized a 9,744-plant growing operation in Umatilla County, which is ideally situated for drug traffickers due to its close proximity to the I-84 transportation corridor.

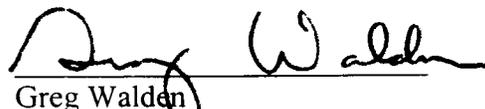
Local law enforcement officials have informed us that without a HIDTA designation, the future of the Blue Mountain Narcotics Team (BENT), which serves Morrow and Umatilla counties, will be in doubt. Without this cooperative anti-drug task force, the people of eastern Oregon will become even more vulnerable to the drug manufacturers and distributors who prey upon their children.

We fear that failing to recognize and act upon the severe drug manufacturing problem in Umatilla County, while designating as HIDTAs four Oregon counties whose drug problem is arguably less severe, will only increase the perception among many eastern Oregonians that the needs of rural residents receive less attention than those of urban and suburban citizens. We urge you to correct this inequity by making an additional HIDTA designation and thus communicating the federal government's strong support for the counter-drug efforts of rural law enforcement officers.

If you have any questions about this request, please feel free to contact Dallas Boyd at (202) 226-7338 or Alison Buist at (202) 224-3753.

Thank you for your attention to this important matter. We look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,


Greg Walden
United States Representative


Gordon H. Smith
United States Senator

Cc: The Honorable Asa Hutchinson, Administrator, Drug Enforcement Administration