

ERGONOMICS: A YEAR OF BROKEN PROMISES

MARCH 20, 2001 – April 5, 2002

Bush Administration Fails to Protect Workers

I intend to pursue a comprehensive approach to ergonomics, which may include new rulemaking.... This approach will provide employers with achievable measures that protect their employees before injuries occur.

-- Elaine Chao, March 6, 2001

"The safety and health of our Nation's workforce is a priority for my Administration. Together we will pursue a comprehensive approach to ergonomics that addresses the concerns surrounding the ergonomics rule repealed today. We will work with the Congress, the business community, and our Nation's workers to address this important issue. "

-- George W. Bush, March 20, 2001 on signing legislation repealing OSHA's ergonomics standard

"Ergonomics injuries are real, and we need to find the most effective way to keep our employees from harm."

-- Elaine Chao, April 25, 2001

"Ergonomics injuries are real," Chao said. "And defining the best, comprehensive approach for ergonomic injuries is not a simple process. However, guiding principles will provide a vital starting point for common understanding, a point from which consensus can be attained."

Chao's principles include:

Prevention-Place greater emphasis on preventing injuries before they occur

Sound Science-Any approach should be based on the best available science and research

Incentive Driven-Cooperation between OSHA and employers is a must

Flexibility-Avoid a one-size-fits-all approach

Feasibility-Small businesses need any future action to recognize cost of compliance

Clarity-Any approach must include short, simple and common sense instructions

-- Elaine Chao, Press Statement, April 26, 2001

[The Secretary] is committed to designing an approach that prevents injuries before they occur rather than reacting after a worker has suffered an injury. We hope that taking a fresh, independent look at the issue, combined with what we will learn during the forum

process, will lead to a comprehensive plan for addressing ergonomics injuries that employers, their employees and Congress can all support.

-- Chris Spear, Assistant Secretary of Labor for Policy,, July 18, 2001

We want to find a way to prevent ergonomic injuries, a way that will survive the expected torrent of criticism, litigation, and congressional review.

-- Chris Spear July 24, 2001

I want to assure the Committee that the Assistant Secretary for OSHA, John Henshaw, and I are very serious about addressing the ergonomics issues. We believe that taking a fresh, independent look at the issues, combined with what we learned during the forum process, will lead to a comprehensive approach for addressing ergonomics injuries that will improve safety and health in the workplace.

-- Elaine Chao letter to Senator Tom Harkin, November 5, 2001