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Editorial: Fund NBAF lab

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A report calling for another assessment of risks associated with placing a \$650 million national animal disease laboratory in Manhattan has given new hope to those who want the facility to be built in their state or remain where it is on Plum Island, N.Y.

We find some consolation in Department of Homeland Security Secretary Janet Napolitano's recent assurances the National Bio and Agro-Defense Facility was indeed going to be built in Kansas, but we'll put our faith in our own congressional delegation's determination to see the state retains its designation, won in a fair selection process, as the site for the new lab.

The Republican members of the state's delegation recently responded to a Government Accounting Office draft report that indicated the selection of Kansas State University was based on a flawed analysis that didn't adequately consider the threat of a tornado capable of destroying the lab. Kansas Republicans promptly noted the county is Texas that sought the NBAF is more tornado-prone than Manhattan and also presents a hurricane risk.

However, the Texas officials who filed a lawsuit challenging the initial selection process probably weren't at all dismayed to see the GAO report. The Lone Star State has played the role of poor loser to perfection since the DHS announced it had picked Kansas State University as the building site for a lab to replace the aging one on Plum Island.

Should the GAO's final report on the issue present any opening at all, there's no doubt the Texas congressional delegation will use it to its advantage and try to reopen the selection process.

If it sounds like we're picking on Texans here, it's because we are -- they've brought it on themselves with all their whining.

But we will note there are those who don't think the animal disease laboratory should ever leave Plum Island, where it enjoys a measure of isolation not available on the mainland. That argument was evaluated by the Environmental Protection Agency, which ruled it had been fairly considered by the DHS during the selection process.

We've also said on more than one occasion that researching animal diseases at KSU is just as safe as researching human diseases, such as swine flu and Ebola, in Atlanta, home of the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. We haven't changed our mind, and think Congress should proceed with authorizing funding for the NBAF at KSU.

The Senate has passed a bill containing the first \$36 million for the facility, but a House version of the measure didn't contain any construction money.

The House should act soon to correct the oversight so work can begin on a state-of-the-art research facility at K-State, where it belongs.

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