Eulogy for Eula Bingham

With great sadness, the Collegium Ramazzini announces the death of Professor Eula Bingham, long-time Fellow and Past President of the Collegium Ramazzini, a globally recognized champion for the health and safety of working people. Eula Bingham was a true giant of occupational health. Throughout the 90 years of her life, she insisted tirelessly that workers
had the absolute right to be safe on the job. Her thoughtful and generous wisdom shaped the entire field of occupational safety and health. Her bold and courageous actions prevented countless illnesses and injuries in workers around the world.

Dr. Bingham began her scientific career at the University of Cincinnati School of Medicine in 1961 with pioneering research on chemical carcinogenesis. She studied polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in coke ovens. She published a major paper on bladder cancer in chemical workers that she had researched in her own city of Cincinnati. These studies led Dr. Bingham to the realization that American workers are exposed daily in their work to known and suspect chemical carcinogens often under poorly controlled conditions that pose grave dangers to their health. This recognition spurred her to a lifetime of public service on behalf of workers.

Beginning in the early 1970s, Dr. Bingham recognized that the Occupational Safety and Health Act, the then new legislation that had passed in 1970 and created NIOSH and OSHA, opened up powerful new opportunities to protect workers against carcinogens and other toxic chemicals. In 1973, she served on a Department of Labor Standards Advisory Committee on Carcinogens whose purpose was to recommend controls to prevent workplace cancer. She went on in 1975 to chair the Federal Research Standards Advisory Committee on Coke Oven Emissions, service that built on her earlier research experience with polycyclic aromatic hydrocarbons in coal tar in her coke ovens research. She was also a member of the National Academy of Sciences’ Lead in Paint Commission and a science policy advisor to FDA and EPA.

Dr. Bingham’s research and policy work in occupational safety and health led President Carter to nominate her on March 11, 1977 to be Assistant Secretary of Labor and OSHA Administrator.

From 1977 to 1981, Eula Bingham served as Assistant Secretary of Labor at the US. Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) in the administration of President Jimmy Carter. Her work at OSHA resulted in the passage of the occupational lead exposure standard, arguably the most comprehensive and innovative occupational health and safety standard ever established in the United States; to passage of the “Right-to-Know” standard giving workers the right to know the chemical hazards in the places where they worked; and to passage of the cotton dust standard designed to protect textile workers in the American South - the poorest, least-represented, politically-powerless industrial workers in the nation – against the ravages of byssinosis. Another of Dr. Bingham’s enduring legacies at OSHA was the creation of a comprehensive worker training program— the New Directions program -- that built a cadre of health and safety activists in unions, in communities, and in academia, who continue today, nearly 40 years later to sustain the fight for a safe and healthy workplace. Following her return to Cincinnati at the conclusion of her service in Washington, began a series of collaborations with construction workers who had been employed at US Department of Energy (DOE) nuclear weapons production sites during the Cold War. The goal of this pioneering research was to identify risks to workers at these nuclear sites. Dr. Bingham was one of the first scientists in America to address this issue, which had previously been shrouded in national security concerns.

The first of Dr. Bingham’s collaborations with DOE workers was with the Carpenters Union at the Oak Ridge Site where the workers believed they had been exposed to radiation and hazardous chemicals. Dr. Bingham developed a novel method to reconstruct these workers’ past exposures, based upon building blueprints, remodeling records and worker interviews. Construction workers marked maps of the buildings in which they had worked and their tasks. This effort was necessary because little information was available from DOE which had not provided medical examinations or even radiation badges for workers in the early years of weapons production.

This research was highly successful and on the basis of Dr. Bingham’s findings, her scientific reputation and her personal commitment to ending hazards in the workplace, DOE was persuaded to initiate the Former Worker Medical Screening Program, a national program to screen workers at its nuclear sites. Following initiation of this program, Dr. Bingham began collaboration with the Center to Protect Workers’ Rights (CPWR) in joint efforts throughout the U.S. to identify construction workers at risk in nuclear sites and to provide them with medical examinations.
From 1992 to 1997, Eula Bingham served with great distinction as second President of the Collegium Ramazzini following the death of the Collegium’s founder, Professor Irving Selikoff. She was the recipient of the Collegium Ramazzini’s highest honor, the Ramazzini Award, in 2000.

Eula Bingham was an accomplished and beloved teacher. As Vice-President and Dean of the Graduate School, and professor at the University of Cincinnati, she continued her advocacy for worker safety and health. Her enlightenment of students to worker safety and health issues has ensured that her hundreds of students will carry her knowledge and passion for worker protection on to many new generations assuring that worker safety and health will continue to be a key component of medical practice. Eula Bingham was the recipient of numerous honors and awards, including: the Asbestos Disease Awareness Organization’s Selikoff Lifetime Achievement Award in 2019; the American Public Health Association’s David Platt Rall Award for Advocacy in Public Health in 2000; the Mary O. Amdur Award from New York University in 1999; the Henry Smythe, Jr. Toxicologist Award of the American Academy of Industrial Hygiene in 1998; the American Industrial Hygiene Association’s Alice Hamilton Award in 1995; the United Steel Workers of America’s first William Lloyd Award for Occupational Safety in 1984; the American Public Health Association’s Alice Hamilton Award in 1984; the Rockefeller Foundation’s Public Service Award in 1980; and the American Lung Association’s Julia Jones Award in 1980. Eula Bingham died on June 13, 2020. Her colleague Dr. Carol Rice wrote on the occasion of Dr. Bingham’s death, “On Saturday, the heart that embraced the rights of every worker stopped beating and Eula Bingham slipped away. She leaves a legacy of laboratory research relevant to the workplace, health and safety policy and regulations, students who went on to improve workplaces and the environment through professional practice and research, and generations of workers empowered to limit exposure to toxics. The Bingham ripples into the future are mighty: continued progress toward ‘employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards’ inches forward each day, as the winds blow beneath all those many wings she embolden to fly.”

In summarizing Dr. Bingham’s and her life’s work, President Jimmy Carter stated in 2015 that,

“I was fortunate to have many outstanding appointments in our administration, and Eula was one of the best. I always could count on her for sound and direct advice with the well-being of the American worker foremost in her mind.”

“She helped eliminate barriers to women in the workforce and to make our nation’s workforce stronger and more productive. Eula deserves credit as one of the unsung heroes giving women an important voice and a place in our nation’s history. We all should be proud of her service to our country.”

Dr. Eula Bingham was a renowned scholar in occupational safety and health, a national leader, and a hero to working men and women around the world. Eula Bingham is survived by her daughters Julia Mattheis, Helen (Brett Visger) and Martha Mattheis; granddaughters Charlotte and Anna Visger. Condolences may be sent to: 3547 Herschel View St, Cincinnati OH 45208 USA.

Chip Hughes

We lost a great champion for worker’s health and environmental health today, as Dr. Eula Bingham has passed on. She will live on in our hearts always. Also she will always be remembered as a partner and co-conspirator with Dave Rall and the birth of NTP and NIEHS.

Almost 45 years ago, I still remember her tears as Assistant Secretary of Labor and OSHA Director, as she met with textile workers suffering from brown lung disease and vowed to take on a powerful entrenched industry. She freaked out President Carter at the time. I was 25 as the OSHA New Directions Worker Training Program was created and we became its first grantee. As the children and descendants of Eula, look what it has spawned at OSHA, NIOSH, NIEHS and throughout the world of public health!! Her legacy lives on in all of us!!
That is such a terrible loss!! She was such an amazing individual, and laid the path for so many today.

Wanda Hunt A brilliant person and field leader.

Michael Gill She was a true example of a representative for workers. She proved that the government can be of the people, for the people. She would not allow industries to hide their sins behind their lobbying money. She inspired many of us to fight for worker safety. Her strengths and humanity will be missed.

Amy Hughes How great to have her as a teacher, leader and mentor at the beginning of your career. So sorry for this loss chip but how vitally important that she lived so long to do such great work.

Adam Finkel What a sad day, Chip-- she was the OSHA leader who took most seriously the "half" of the Agency that seeks to reduce chronic disease, and as kind to younger researchers/advocates as one could imagine. This poem (Robert Frost) has nothing to do with our field, but it's the first thing that entered my mind when I saw this news:

"He would declare and could himself believe
That the birds there in all the garden round
From having heard the daylong voice of Eve
Had added to their own an over sound,
Her tone of meaning but without the words."
Admittedly an eloquence so soft
Could only have had an influence on birds
When call or laughter carried it aloft.
Be that as may be, she was in their song.
Moreover her voice upon their voices crossed
Had now persisted in the woods so long
That probably it never would be lost.
Never again would birds' song be the same.
And to do that to birds was why she came."

_Symantha Aydt_ Blessings to the family of an amazing woman I was lucky enough to work with!

_Lee Guion_ 45 years. Thank you & others for carrying on Eula’s work, Chip.

_Lee Guion_ Chip Hughes Wow. Thanks. And Ted designed the first People’s Alliance t-shirt too. I still have it somewhere.

_Steve Doherty_ Rest In Peace.

_Mac McDougall_ Eula was just a wonderful, warm person. She was totally committed to working people right to the end. I remember asking her once what she was most proud of from her OSHA days. She talked about the lead standard. Re Jimmy Carter, she had a great story about trying to regulate beryllium.

_Celesta Fahey_ Eula is the reason why I loved working at OSHS. She was a fighter and protector of the workers. She will be missed.

_John S. Morawetz_ Her great legacy will always live on.

_Dorothy Wigmore_ I went looking for photos I got of her at ADAO's conference last year. Here's one, as she chats with _Mark D Catlin_ about the Hazard Communication Standard.
Dorothy Wigmore And here's another, as Earl Dotter whispered in her ear, at the same event. They're in front of the exhibit of his photos.

Chip Hughes 2 icons of our movement.

Marian Berkowitz That’s amazing. What a legacy.

Robin Fuchs Young Thanks Chip, good to learn about Dr. Bingham’s important contributions. And I have to ask, with all respect, is she really best described as a “side kick?”

Suzanne L. Mager Bonnie Friedman and she brought in a lot of women leaders to the agency. A huge influence in my life and career.

Jen Sass oh no! Chip, thanks for letting us know. Eula was mighty and fierce and bold and focused, but also kind and generous to everyone. She taught me a lot. I am so sad.

Jim Key I remember Ms. Bingham, when I first became a Union Worker Health and Safety Representative at a DOE Contractor location. Prayers 🙏🏻🙏🏻🙏🏻 for her family and friends.
Doug Stephens I am sorry to hear of Eula Bingham’s passing. We can never enter into a conversation about OSHA, health and safety or leading a fight for worker health without first thinking about her. She set a high standard in worker health and safety protection. She will be sorely missed.

Philip Shabecoff She was also a good honest source for reporter and a total sweetie.

Melissa McDiarmid RIP, mentor, mother and Great Lioness of Occupational Health!

Joe Graedon Eula and David...two of the greats. We need them back inspiring us more than ever. Who will be the next to fill those giant shoes?

Karen Miller Dr Bingham thank you for your contributions.. INSPIRING. RIP

Liam O'Fallon Thanks for sharing this sad news, Chip. I met Eula at the first Community Engagement Core (then COEP) I helped convene in 2000 (in Detroit). She was a very kind, but hold-your-feet-to-the-fire person. She had me sweating when I was introducing the first version of the Resource Center. I am sorry to hear that she has died. I know her memory will live on in the stories people share about all she accomplished to advance community environmental (& occupational) health. In peace, Liam.

Andrea Hricko Liam O'Fallon we loved her also! John authored the osha lead standard under her! And she appointed me and claudia Miller as the first two women ever appointed to NACOSH! Yes we will miss her ....

Bill Borwegen Workers lost one of their best allies in Dr. Bingham. So many of us got our start under her truly inspired New Directions Program. She was a mentor to all who leaves behind a remarkable and indelible legacy.

Marianne Parker Brown Eula was a Giant in the field of workplace health and safety. She was fierce when need be and really a gentle soul when u got to know her. She and Tony Mazzochi inspired me to go into the field even tho at that time Reagan was undermining unions. Truly an inspirational leader❤️👍🏾🛠

Marianne Brown Exactly!
Jim Judge  What a great story of courage. I am happy you were fortunate to have worked with her.

Elizabeth H. Maples  Indeed! Rest In Peace warrior!

Jill James  Sounds like it’s time to ask my favorite historian, Mark D Catlin to come back on my podcast to honor Eula’s story.

Sharon Morris  I enjoyed my interactions with Eula. She was a friend of workers and a friend of NIOSH.

Lori Powell Purnell  Blessed Spirit and legend.

Suzanne L. Mager  Love her!! What an honor it was to work for her at OSHA in the New Directions program! She was such a force! And at the same time a lovely, supportive person. 

Melissa Pinke  Let’s keep moving forward with safety and health!

Ruth McCully  Such sad news. When I started at OSHA when she was assistant secretary. I idolized her and so proud to say that she was our leader. I still have my credentials with her signature. She was fierce in her actions to improve safety and health and equally kind.

Jim Albers  What a legend! I only got to know Eula personally after moving to Cincinnati in '93. The New Directions program initiated under her direction was gutsy and amazing. It gave unions the opportunity to develop worker-centered oh&s tools to educate and org... See More

Chris Portier  I had dinner with her last year and she told the most interesting and funny stories about her life. She has been an inspiration to generations of environmental and occupational health scientists. She will be greatly missed.

William Toscano  She was a titanic force for environmental and occupational health.
Rest in Peace, Eula Bingham.

In this photo from April 1989, Dr. Bingham (in the middle) after the Exxon-Valdez oil spill in Alaska, led an occupational health and safety team heading to Valdez, investigating cleanup worker health and safety problems. I (in red) was honored to be on her team, along with Dr. Scott Barnhart and Matt Gillen. Mano Frey, with the Alaska Laborers Union and the Laborers International Union (LIUNA) had called for Dr. Bingham's assistance.

Mark D Catlin is with Marion Gillen.

Rest in Peace, Eula Bingham. In this photo from April 1989, Dr. Bingham (in the middle) after the Exxon-Valdez oil spill in Alaska, ...

RIP Eula Bingham. Thanks for your lifetime fighting for worker health and safety.

This video is clipped from Dr. Eula Bingham’s first press conference as President Carter’s new Assistant Secretary for OSHA on April 29, 1977. Dr. Bingham, an occupational health scientist from the University of Cincinnati, had been confirmed earlier in April. In addition to announcing action on a more protective benzene standard, she also announced her intention for OSHA to take action on many health hazards in workplaces. This clip is from a 30 minute video of this entire OSHA press conference which is posted to my channel.
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Dr Bingham Benzene ETS Press Conference April 29 1977 OSHA Eula statement only

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8 Luis Antonio Vazquez, John S. Morawetz and 46 others

Comments

Linda Alerding Great picture! She will be missed

Jim Catalano Rest In Peace Dr Bingham

Barbara Catlin 🦀 🙏 Peace.

RL Rhine Awwww, Eula. Such a legend.

John Scardella So sad, RIP Eula.

Gail Gislason We lost a great one
Venetia Runnion What a loss to the health and safety community and the world. RIP Dr Bingham...

Shari Berkowitz I’m very sorry...

Pam Susi Oh no, that breaks my heart. Such a leader in the field of occupational health. She loved to garden too, I would always ask her what she was growing when I’d see her at meetings in the spring. She seemed to light up when she talked about that.

David F Goldsmith Her memory is an inspiration for all those concerned that the science and policy are in synch.

Patricia Block Greenberg Rest In Peace Dr. Bingham.

Dorothy Wigmore One of my heroines, I was so glad to capture some of her conversations with you last year, Mark, and to chat with her a bit. We must get Richard A. Lemen to tell the story he told then about how she got the cotton dust standard (I think it was) through, as she recounted it to a USW conference. Rest in power, Eula.

Frank Hearl She will be missed.

Thomas McQuiston One of my great mentors.

Mark D Catlin

Speaking on a panel at a June 2013 Conference with Eula Bingham, former Assistant Secretary of Labor for OSHA, 1977 to 1981 and a generational leader for improving workplace health and safety.
October 10, 2012

For a present, Eula Bingham, former head of OSHA, brought me a picture of the day she issued the cotton dust standard in 1978. Along w Labor Sec Ray Marshall, a young Eula, and John Froines, she wanted me to see our slogan "Cotton Dust Kills" written on the blackboard behind them. Wonderful history!!

Symantha Aydt What a mentor!

Jim Judge glad you got to work with her..

Suzanne L. Mager Love her!! What an honor it was to work for her in the New Directions program. ❤️😢
Ruth McCully  Thank you Eula. Such an important standard. As I was unpacking from our recent move, I found my copy of the cotton dust poster that the Reagan administration demanded be destroyed. Brought back memories of sampling for cotton dust with a vertical eleutriator.

Chip Hughes  Hiding and shipping out the videos, posters and booklets with the biased earl dotter photos before Thorne auchter could destroy them!! 1984 hadn’t even happened yet!!!

Chris De Rosa  The very best!! 🙏

Thanks everyone for sharing- I want to echo everyone’s messages regarding Eula Bingham. I met her during the summers of 1977 and 1978 when she led OSHA. I was first working with Tony Mazzocchi in Washington DC and helped the OCAW prepare for the Beryllium and Benzene hearing for OSHA standards. Then I spent about 3 months working with OSHA in 1978 before beginning medical school. Meeting Eula was pivotal for me seeing a strong woman playing a leading role in the Occupational Safety and Health movement. The combined experience of working with both Eula Bingham and Tony Mazzacchi at such a formative time in my life has played a huge role in shaping how I have tried to make my mark on improving workers' lives. Thank-you Eula!

Sherry

On Sun, Jun 14, 2020 at 9:33 PM Rafael Moure-Eraso <rmoureeraso@gmail.com> wrote:

The passing of Dr. Bingham is the end of an important period in US occupational safety and health. She was my advisor for my MS in occupational hygiene at UC. Her scientific contributions to toxicology, especially occupational carcinogenesis, advanced substantially the knowledge on causes and mechanisms of cancer. She educated a generation of scientist-activists that defined occupational health as a human rights issue. She was attacked by the UC academics for supporting labor on H&S (she advocated for OCAW during the Shell strike in 1973 and supported actions on campus).

When she was called by President Carter to Washington to direct OSHA, she made the post of head of OSHA a position to advocate for workers health rather than a bureaucratic post to argue both sides of the "issue".

When she came back to UC she continued her advocacy for workers' health. She will be missed.Workers health and safety has lost an effective advocate. **Rafael Moure-Eraso**, Former Chair, President’s Chemical Safety Board
Monforton, Celeste <cmonfort@email.gwu.edu> wrote: I learned this morning that Eula Bingham passed away on Saturday, June 13. Dr. Bingham was a skilled toxicologist and powerful advocate for workers. She worked closely with luminaries, notably, Dr. John Froines, Dr. Phil Landrigan, Dr. Anthony Robbins, and the late Dr. Cesare Maltoni and Dr. Irving Selikoff.

She served as the assistant secretary of OSHA during the Carter Administration (1977-1980). She collaborated closely with individuals in the labor movement. During her tenure, OSHA adopted many standards including benzene, DBCP, arsenic, cotton rust, lead, roof guarding, and access to medical records. She also was responsible for securing funding for the New Directions grants program, now known as the Susan Harwood grants.

Her colleague Dr. Carol Rice shared the news of Eula's passing in this way:

On Saturday, the heart that embraced the rights of every worker stopped beating and Eula Bingham slipped away. She leaves a legacy of laboratory research relevant to the workplace health and safety policy and regulations, students who went on to improve workplaces and the environment through professional practice and research, and generations of workers empowered to limit exposure to toxics. The Bingham ripples into the future are mighty: continued progress toward ‘employment and a place of employment which are free from recognized hazards’ inches forward each day, as the winds blow beneath all those many wings she embolden to fly.

The address to send a note to her family is: 3547 Herschel View St, Cincinnati OH 45208.

From: Wright, Mike Sent: Monday, June 15, 2020 8:46 AM To: 'Eric Frumin'; Franklin Mirer; Peg Seminario; Debbie Berkowitz Cc: Barab, Jordan; Philip Landrigan; David Michaels; Anthony Robbins; Anthony ROBBINS, MD; John Froines; Andrea Hricko; Comai, Andrew

A sad day, but one tempered by the joyful remembrance of a life so well lived. There are few who combine Eula’s scientific integrity, activism, vision, and humanity. She wasn’t the first OSHA head, but she was its architect. She showed what OSHA could be, not just a “regulatory agency,” but a smart group of public servants committed to human welfare. Steelworkers owe her a special debt of gratitude for her skilled leadership of OSHA’s Coke Oven Advisory Committee before she became Assistant Secretary. Her work there led directly to what was at the time OSHA’s most innovative standard.

I remember her terrible disappointment when Jimmy Carter bowed to pressure from the Defense Department and the predecessor to the Energy Department, and cancelled the beryllium rulemaking. She must have considered resigning, but knew she could accomplish more. And she did – cotton dust, lead, arsenic. She also reoriented the agency’s priorities toward the most dangerous hazards and exposures and the worst offenders, completing and extending work that had begun with her predecessor, Mort Corn. She skillfully navigated through the deregulatory shoals in both the Administration and Congress, and kept it afloat and intact.

She was also important to the early days of the right-to-know movement. There had been significant opposition within the OSHA staff to a “labeling” standard, as they called it. A lot of health professionals thought it was a waste of the agency’s resources; that workers wouldn’t understand the information; and that chemical safety ought to be left to the experts. Eula strongly disagreed, and ultimately won many of them over. Although the draft standard quickly died in the early days of the Reagan Administration, Eula’s influence persisted and paid off when we forced the Administration to act by passing right-to-know all over the country, a fight she helped with after leaving the DOL.
Eula would be the first to say that her accomplishments were not hers alone, and required collective will and action. But a collective is made up of individuals, and the part she played was fundamental.

Mike

Michael J. Wright Director of Health, Safety and Environment United Steelworkers

“My friends, love is better than anger. Hope is better than fear. Optimism is better than despair. So let us be loving, hopeful and optimistic. And we’ll change the world.”

Jack Layton

From: Eric Frumin [mailto:Eric.Frumin@changetowin.org]

Sent: Monday, June 15, 2020 1:28 AM To: Franklin Mirer; Peg Seminario; Debbie Berkowitz

Cc: Barab, Jordan; Philip Landrigan; David Michaels; Anthony Robbins; Anthony ROBBINS, MD; John Froines; Andrea Hricko; Wright, Mike; Comai, Andrew; Eric Frumin

Subject: RE: Eula Bingham -RIP

Hi all.

(And so good to connect again, Tony R, John F and Andrea H).

I second all these sentiments. As you, I have many fond memories of working with Eula, and with all of you in that productive, seminal period. But two memories stand out the strongest, which I think revealed some of Eula’s great strengths:

- Her strong support for the Field Sanitation Standard
- Her strength in the defense of the cotton dust standard.

Both of these (and much more) revealed her commitment to the workers whose dire plight, in the midst of America’s economic heyday, were so often ignored in the debates about economic and labor policy affecting the industries with strong unions.

The struggle of 1,000,000 textile production workers for economic, social and racial justice in particular, most of whom were in the old Confederacy, had by May 1978 become the poster child in the AFL-CIO’s efforts for “labor law reform.” The Senate debate began on May 16, and ended June 23 in a successful right-wing filibuster in which democrat Dale Bumpers of Arkansas (and mentor to Bill Clinton) cast the deciding vote to maintain the filibuster.

It was at exactly this same time that the cotton dust standard was under debate between Ray Marshall/Eula Bingham and the White House economic staff.

Eula and Ray Marshall called the bluff of the anti-regulation crowd at the White House and EB reportedly threatened to resign if they insisted that the cotton dust standard allow for PPE instead of engineering controls.

And she was doing it not only for the principle, but also to defend among the poorest, least-represented, politically-powerless industrial workers in the economy, many of them women and people of color, who lived in the most reactionary part of the nation.

Her kind of people.

For those whose memories might have possibly flagged over the decades (Moi, perhaps?), here are two of the articles by star NY Times investigative journalist David Burnham when Eula or someone else at DOL leaked the war of memos
between the economics assholes at the Carter White House and Marshall/Bingham, in the weeks leading up to the issuance of the Cotton Dust Standard in June, 1978. While the Lead Standard


(Note that the reporter to whom Eula or someone else leaked the memos was David Burnham, who had previously done the Serpico story and later was the person to whom Karen Silkwood was headed with the evidence of defective nuclear materials when she was killed by Kerr-McGee.)

Different times, for sure. But not that different. Cass Sunstein and most of the Obama domestic policy apparatus would have felt at home with Stu Eizenstat, Charles Schultz, et al.

Eula’s bravery and determination to protect cotton textile workers was of course vindicated by the Supreme Court’s 5-3 affirmation of the standard in 1981, forever outlawing the use of cost-benefit analysis in the setting of standards for toxics under Section 6.b.5.

I miss Eula, I miss Ray Marshall, and I miss the hope that we had in 1980 for the workers’ health and safety movement.

I miss Paul Wellstone, and I’ll never recover personally from the beating we took on ergonomics.

But every day the Fight For 15 and the Movement for Black Lives take to the streets, and every day that Amazon workers stand up to Jeff Bezos, workers are all stronger and more powerful than we ever were when we had to rely on the then-established and but diminishing tools of trade union influence.

I just hope that the movement for workers’ rights and economic justice are up to the challenge. Judging from the events of the last few months, I think the possibilities are certainly there, and worth the fight.

Especially for the poorest and least powerful among us.

Keep Hope Alive. Si Se Puede.

From: Franklin Mirer [mailto:Franklin.Mirer@sph.cuny.edu]

Sent: Sunday, June 14, 2020 12:50 PM

To: Peg Seminario <pseminario228@gmail.com>; Debbie Berkowitz <DBerkowitz@nelp.org>

Cc: Barab, Jordan <Jordan.Barab@mail.house.gov>; Philip Landrigan <landrigp@bc.edu>; David Michaels <drdavidmichaels@gmail.com>; Anthony Robbins <arobbi02@emerald.tufts.edu>; Anthony ROBBINS, MD <anthony.robbins@tufts.edu>; John Froines <jfroines@ucla.edu>; Andrea Hricko <ahricko@usc.edu>; Eric Frumin <Eric.Frumin@changetowin.org>; Wright, Mike <mwright@usw.org>; Comai, Andrew <AComai@uaw.net>

Subject: RE: Eula Bingham -RIP

Eula Bingham was a pioneer of the modern workplace safety and health movement. A friend of working people and a mentor to me. Eula lead safety and health from her position as head of OSHA, and kept her leadership role in our movement since 1980. Eula never gave up.

Frank
This is so very sad. For so many of us Eula blazed the path and set the example that safety and health knowledge and skills aren't worth a damn unless combined with activism, commitment and the willingness to fight for what is right and just. So much of what we have accomplished in the last five decades is due to the vision she provided, the direction she set and the foundation she built - all based upon the belief that ensuring strong rights for workers and unions was a prerequisite for protecting workers safety and health.

How blessed and fortunate we all are to have had such a good teacher, leader and friend.

Peg
Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), can look back over her career with the clarity of the long view and identify the turning points in her professional evolution. Sometimes her career moved serendipitously; some turning points resulted from choices she made or came through people she met along the path; and some emerged from the knowledge developed in her laboratory or in her policy-making roles. Underlying those significant changes though was something innate: in her earliest memories, she responded to competitive challenges. As a Kentucky schoolgirl in the 1930s, after someone suggested she would not always lead her class academically, Bingham grew even more engaged. “We’ll just see about that,” she told herself.

Though the turning points in her career may have been inauspicious or unrecognized as they happened, they helped direct her professional course in large and small ways. For instance, as a graduate student assigned for the first time to test a patient who had developed a rash from a workplace exposure, Bingham learned that small amounts of toxic substances on the job could cause serious harms, an insight that was not widely recognized at the time and one that impressed her. She observed that outcome repeatedly in her scientific work. In another instance, a boss prudently warned her to protect herself as she tested cutting oils on lab animals that unexpectedly then grew tumors from the exposures she had given them. That outcome taught her that precaution is smart practice in uncertain circumstances. In later work, Bingham learned much more: that she did not like clinical care roles, that she enjoyed collegiality with her peers and multidisciplinary approaches to work, that she preferred government funding for her research rather than private industry’s, that professional networks were important, and that she had the executive ability to lead a large research program and to devise sound public policy. In those heady days for public health after the founding of OSHA and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), she put many of these lessons to work when President Jimmy Carter nominated her in 1977 to lead OSHA.

Bingham won an award years later from the American Public Health Association and a colleague praised her then as a statesperson scientist who worked “with one eye on truth and the other on social justice” [1]. If she kept her eye on
truth as a scientist, it was in her governmental and teaching roles and her friendships with labor figures that she learned about and advocated social justice. That accolade was a remarkable testament to a pragmatic and feisty woman who had mapped a career path in occupational and environmental health science, cued by diverse turning points that steadily delivered “lessons learned.” And while she may not use the most current linguistic frames—she rarely mentioned sustainability, for example—it is clear that many of its inherent principles guided her actions as a scientific researcher, public policy-maker, and advocate even before they were publicly enunciated. Precaution in the face of uncertainty, for instance, as shown in one example above.

Bingham is perhaps most widely noted today for her role at OSHA where she polished the agency’s tarnished reputation and where she aggressively championed protections for workers with new standards and innovative policy approaches. She battled to put information on workplace chemicals in the hands of workers and then began a large-scale training effort, called New Directions, to teach them how to use their new knowledge. Many in the field today believe that training effort seeded the development of public health movements, such as the Coalitions for Occupational Safety and Health (COSHes), which came after it. She has since called the prominence she gave to worker training “probably one of the most lasting things I’ve done.” In scientific research, Bingham has been internationally honored for her work on chemical carcinogenesis (the production of cancers from chemical exposures) and toxicology.

Another award that she prized was conferred about the time she left OSHA. Bingham received the Rockefeller Foundation Public Service Award from Princeton University for her life’s work. Since then, she has done another generation’s worth of research, teaching, and service. In 1989, she became a member of the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, which led to work that she found very satisfying. While she gave up teaching in 2004 and stopped being an expert witness in legal cases even earlier, she continued to conduct research, write papers and edit books (including, with

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friends, a 9-volume reference work called Patty’s Toxicology), and has fulfilled a host of advisory commitments. “Now and then,” she said, she and President Carter still exchange messages. She goes back periodically to Woods Hole Oceanographic Institute on Cape Cod, whose library she has treasured since her days as a graduate student.

After her mother died at 99, Bingham found a new interest as she grieved her loss. She and her three daughters were close to her mother, of whom she said, “I never could have done what I did without her.” Bingham turned to genealogy to search for her mother’s roots. After a death, “you think and think and think, and [doing genealogy] was part of my grieving process. It’s how I got started, and then I just loved it.” The elder Mrs. Bingham had been orphaned and adopted as a child, but Eula knew her mother’s family. Bingham started there and worked back to the unknown. She eventually found and visited a first cousin in Berlin. She also went to the small village from which her grandmother had emigrated and met other relatives as well. If “owning” her family history satisfied a longing, the investigation also utilized her intellect and professional skills since doing genealogy meant solving a puzzle and “science is always like puzzles.”

Eula Bingham grew up as the only child of a Burlington, Kentucky, farm couple who suffered lean times during the 1930s depression and borrowed to educate their bright daughter because they believed that education provided a chance at a good life even in a sour economy. Her father had been trained in mathematics; her mother had begun, but not finished, nursing school. As farmers though, they were “barely making a living.” While she attended grade school, Bingham lived with an aunt in nearby Covington so that she could take a school bus in the coldest season rather than walk. The Binghams were stricter than some parents and did not allow their daughter to date early or steadily, though it was not the prevailing local view. “I was allowed to have a car and drive at 16 and go to the game, but no going steady. It really was hard on me, but that’s the way it was.”

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She stayed in Kentucky for college and earned a degree in chemistry and
biology in 1951, and then she worked as an analytical chemist for a year in Cincinnati. She earned a master’s degree in physiology at the University of Cincinnati and then a doctorate in zoology there 4 years later. In fact, the university became not only her early incubator but also her professional home. She spent many summers at Woods Hole in Massachusetts, where she pored over its library holdings for rewarding hours. The multidisciplinarity of her degrees is worth noting—chemistry and biology, physiology and zoology, with minors in ecology and biochemistry—related areas but stretching in new directions. As Bingham recounted, she veered into occupational health serendipitously and gradually. In graduate school, she had to make her own way by taking a job in addition to her teaching assistantship. Her first foray into outside work was as a laboratory technician at a hospital. Her boss was a pathologist whose research started with tuberculosis but moved on to histoplasmosis, which was a disease incurred by city workers who cleaned out water towers. Her job was to study the tissues of infected animals. Her boss treated her “like a colleague” and the work generated her first publications since she too was credited as an author of those scientific papers. When that research grant ended, her mentor helped Bingham to her next job. She signed up with Ray Suskind in the Department of Environmental Health at her own university. Suskind was a dermatologist doing immunology studies using guinea pigs and he noted that Bingham worked easily with animals. In both the histoplasmosis study and this new one, the principal investigators asked her to administer tests to patients. In doing so, she learned that she did not enjoy working with sick people. She remembered one of her first patients there: a seamstress who made uniforms and had a rash on her arms, legs, and trunk. Suskind directed her to wash the fabric the patient worked with “and then we’ll see if she’s sensitive to what comes off the material.” Bingham had to dilute the runoff, make up the solutions, and test the woman’s skin with them. Her patient “was all healed up, but then she’d get a big welt where we put the fluid from the material.” The fluid, she learned, contained a urea formaldehyde resin, which caused the woman’s rash. For Bingham, it was the first time of many when “I just kept
coming to that interface” of minuscule work environment exposures to chemicals and harmful health effects. In another case, she found painters sensitized to chromium and, in a third instance, a woman who had a sensitization to nickel, all due to workplace exposures. Despite the fact that she had diluted the suspect substances “way down,” they still produced adverse reactions. Colleagues later asked her, “Why [did] you get on this kick of thinking that very small quantities cause adverse health effects?” She told them, “That was one of my first experiences . . . so I didn’t think it took a ton of material to cause an adverse health effect.” The insight that small doses of chemical substances could cause serious health effects stayed with her.

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Something else that lingered was a new name. Her office partner in graduate school where she was the only young woman was a curt fellow. When a gaggle of students came down to see him, one of them asked, “What is your name?” She replied, “Eula Lee Bingham.” “Eula Lee Bingham!” he exclaimed. “We can’t call you that!” Another student suggested, “We’re going to call you Max” after the dozens of characters, all named Max, in a book by humorist Max Shulman. Colleagues from her student years and teaching days hailed her that way for decades. In her view, “it was their way of making me one of the boys” [2]. As the only woman, she found that “you really had to work hard to show that you were as good as they were” and years later when she arrived at OSHA, “it was unbelievable to see all of those women [staffers] there.”

After she completed her doctoral work, Bingham married a surgeon who intended to practice in Cincinnati, so she looked for work there. At her own alma mater, she found a position with a “high-powered” group of chemists at the Department of Environmental Health who collaborated to investigate chemical carcinogenesis and needed a biologist. The group worked with such complex mixtures as petroleum fractions, cutting oils, asphalt, and coal tar and its pitch. “They wanted someone who would really develop that area of bioassays, using mice, and later I did some work with other animals. I was not very happy [because] I had moved so far away from biology and zoology. I would think about Woods Hole, but I got married, so there I was.” Her boredom dissipated
though when her boss was awarded a grant to examine immunological factors in cancers. That work intrigued her. And then she researched two cases involving cancers among workers exposed to chemicals on their jobs. Along with the seminars her department head delivered to ignite his team’s interest in workers’ health problems [3], both cases opened her eyes.

In the first, Bingham and her colleagues studied the blood samples of workers at a local manufacturer of benzene-based dyes. At least two men had been diagnosed with bladder cancers in a unit of about 26 people. The carcinogenesis group was called on to do a quasi-epidemiological study that involved examinations of the workers, oral histories, and studies that looked for elevations of certain blood components. The result was startling: nearly half of the workers had bladder cancer. “I was just bowled over,” Bingham said of the results.

“Until that time, the work I had been doing in carcinogenesis was all theory, but that experience made me say, ‘My heavens, this is the real world.’ I began to think maybe there was something to this area, this department I was in.”

The second instance came through a lawsuit. Samples arrived from workers in Cleveland whose jobs exposed them to cutting oils—that is, petroleum oils—while machining, which is the process of altering job materials by such actions as grinding, drilling, milling, and turning. The oils “would flow down over their arms” as they worked. The presiding judge in the case had stopped the trial and asked her lab, which was well known to the petroleum industries, to test the oils for their ability to cause cancer. Bingham drew the assignment. “I don’t think there’s anything wrong with them,” her boss told her, “but you really ought to act like there is.” Protect yourself, he told her. Accordingly, all precautions were taken in the laboratory. Within months, some of the mice developed tumors and several of the oils were shown to be carcinogenic. “I’ll never forget it,” Bingham said. “It changed to some degree my feelings about those bioassays. It had seemed that [conducting the bioassays] wasn’t too interesting, but this put a different light on it.” Again, the research linked disease to workplace exposures. Fortuitously, her boss’ cautionary instincts had protected his team members from toxic exposures on their own jobs even though
he had had no foreknowledge of the dangers they posed.

Another aspect of Bingham’s work that she came to appreciate in the carcinogenesis group was the participatory nature of professional collaboration at team meetings where the leader allowed each specialist time to speak. “The doctor would present, the industrial hygienist would present, the toxicologist would present. It was a conference we all participated in, so that was good. It really made me more interested,” Bingham explained. Collegiality had its satisfactions.

Bingham worked there for several years before the leaders left the team and she made a move, taking over the carcinogenesis group. As the head of the program, she decided to prioritize federal grants rather than rely on industrial support. As a result, she developed a working relationship with Paul Pope Kotin at the National Cancer Institute (NCI) and Hans Falk, the head of the National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS), and won from them her first cooperative agreement in 1962. They had done work on carcinogenesis and air pollution and had read some of Bingham’s publications. Through her work under the agreement, Bingham extended her network to professional contacts in federal agencies, especially at the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) where in the wake of the Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) Act of 1970 an effort was underway to turn NIOSH into a national institute. She became a reviewer of the criteria documents that federal agencies produced since “they wanted toxicologists.” In the early 1970s, she served on the fledgling OSHA’s carcinogen advisory committee, whose charge was to identify cancer-causing agents, and the Labor Department’s commission on coke oven emissions. The service proved useful later and Bingham found the many national developments exciting.

In these and other activities, Bingham met a number of labor union representatives, including Tony Mazzocchi, an officer in the Oil, Chemical and Atomic Workers union (OCAW). A strong advocate for worker health and safety, Mazzocchi had helped achieve passage of the OSH Act. They became good long-time friends. In 1973, when the union struck Shell Oil over workplace health and safety conditions—the first strike over such issues—she helped Mazzocchi. “He asked me to be among a group of scientists to say [that] what
they were striking over with Shell was worthwhile,” she said. Only a few years earlier, researchers had demonstrated that long-time exposures to a host of substances common in workplaces were dangerous to health and the hazards of the workplace environment were only beginning to be recognized as a microcosm and source of toxins in the natural environment [4]. Mazzocchi enlisted scientists to explain the issues, he later said, because “we were fighting over a question that people didn’t quite fully understand and even the workers themselves were only beginning to understand the association between toxic exposure and subsequent ill health effects and death” [5]. Since OCAW members were exposed to numerous chemicals and other hazards on the job, these were significant issues. Unknown to Bingham, Mazzocchi planned a concurrent national consumer boycott of Shell products in support of the strike. When Bingham faced members of the press who were covering the strike, she “was scared to death. I could not sleep the night before. I had never done anything like that.” But she went and their last question concerned her support of the boycott. “I didn’t know anything about a boycott,” she recalled, “and they went down the line and everybody said yes. I said, ‘Well, I don’t really know about the boycott.’ I felt so badly.” But Mazzocchi hurried over and told her, “That was great. It made us look so legitimate!” The months-long strike, and the boycott which was supported by nearly a dozen large environmental organizations, “solidified the tentative labor-environmental alliance” for the future, according to Robert Gordon, a historian of the strike. OCAW subsequently won health and safety committees and plant inspections in numerous contracts [4]. Organizing and direct action had delivered results. By the mid-1970s, Bingham’s carcinogenesis group in Cincinnati had a million-dollar research program, most of it funded by government. By then, she also had three young daughters at home and her marriage had ended in divorce. As a scientist, she had pretty well defined her research interests in those 17 years following her doctoral work: environmental carcinogenesis, toxicology in regulation, risk assessment, and occupational health surveillance. She soon added another focus: worker training on safety and health in the workplace.
In the spring of 1976, Bingham accompanied several occupational safety and health professionals, officials from the United Auto Workers (UAW), and a couple of Congressional staffers on a visit to Sweden, courtesy of that country’s government, to learn how it protected its work force. While there, the Congressional staffers persuaded the UAW representatives to pledge their support to Jimmy Carter, the Democratic presidential candidate. As he campaigned across the country, Carter frequently heard complaints about workplace safety and health issues from people he met. After he won the office, Carter consulted union people when he filled various positions in his administration. In the meantime though, Bingham told the UAW officials that she would train their workers if they wanted her to do so. “I was . . . not political at all,” she said.

As the Carter Administration considered prospective candidates for the Assistant Secretary of Labor position to head OSHA, several factions forwarded Bingham’s name. She captured the support of women’s groups, the AFL-CIO, and the UAW, among others [3]. Bingham, who got wind of the activity on her behalf, laughed and said that as a single parent with three young children, she couldn’t possibly make such a change. But then the Carter Transition Team called and asked her to come to DC to meet Ray Marshall, the designated Secretary of Labor. Her students and family pushed the reluctant scientist to go and she found that Marshall was “just wonderful.”

“He was a professor in economics in Texas [and] had been at the University of Kentucky, so he and I bonded right away,” she recalled. Nevertheless, she described her reservations about such a major change in her life to Marshall, “I can go anywhere in the world I want to go. I’ve got all this money. I’ve got this big research program. Why would I want to leave that?”

“You sound just like me,” he told her, “and here I am.” Bingham returned to Cincinnati but Marshall soon invited her back to meet the President. “They kept saying, ‘We want you for four years,’ and I said, ‘Well, I just couldn’t possibly do that!’ It never really occurred to me that I was going to do it.” Eula returned home and talked with her daughters, ages 11, 12, and 15, who said in a single voice, “Mom, you’ve got to.” The plan was for
her children to go with her, but when it was time to move, they did not want to change schools. With help from her parents and former husband, who still lived nearby, “we worked it out.”

Eula Bingham went to Washington with some big ideas. As she sees it now, “When I was asked to go to OSHA, I was ready.” She knew the science, she knew how to manage, she had professional and labor union networks in place. Importantly, she also had explicit and public support from the President who, unusually, had interviewed her himself. “The President was absolutely wonderful. He would invite me to go to the business roundtable, to dinner, and I would go, and everyone who was there from the administration would line up in a semicircle and he would say, ‘... and Eula’s doing a great job. You ought to get to know her and see what she’s going to do.’ That was a blessing! People would say, ‘Oh boy, she’s got his ear.’ That meant a lot because perceived power is power.”

As she prepared to take office, Bingham and Marshall received a briefing paper from Morton Corn, the outgoing agency head, and they adopted many of the plans Corn had set down. They also decided to tackle head-on the agency’s tattered reputation for intrusiveness, rigidity, and small-minded thinking, which had shattered morale among OSHA’s staff. They devised a public relations campaign based on the idea of “Common Sense Priorities” that focused on serious threats, compliance by small businesses, and simplifying OSHA’s safety rules. They emphasized occupational illness, rather than safety issues, as a priority threat. The strategy adjustments were well received by the media and OSHA’s publics. There was fast progress. Two years later, OSHA had new standards for exposures to lead, cotton dust, and several other chemicals [3].

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The battle over benzene was a long slow one, however. OSHA proposed an emergency temporary standard in May 1977; the American Petroleum Institute challenged it in court the following year and the court stayed action because OSHA had not performed a cost-benefit analysis to show its benefits. OSHA then offered a permanent standard but industry again went back to court. The
Supreme Court upheld the lower court’s decision in 1980, but on other grounds. The court said OSHA first had to quantify the difference in risk between the existing standard and a new one and also demonstrate that the change would mitigate or eliminate risk. The agency had not done so. The following year, in a decision on a challenge to OSHA’s proposed cotton dust rule, the high court said that cost-benefit was not required in decision-making for an OSHA occupational health standard but the court still held that OSHA had to demonstrate substantial risk reduction when it offered a new standard. If the court’s decision on cotton dust had been the one issued in the benzene case, Bingham says now, then the rule could have been set within a reasonable time period. As it was, OSHA did not promulgate its new benzene standard until 1987, 11 years after it was proposed and long after Bingham had left office. That lag time, it has been estimated, likely cost hundreds of workers their lives [6, 7]. In her early flurry of activity in office, Bingham’s OSHA also produced what one critic termed “a pathbreaking proposal” for a generic carcinogens standard, a revision of what Corn had developed [8]. The proposal aimed to identify, classify, and regulate cancer-causing substances in the workplace and it issued a list of suspect substances that OSHA believed required further review [9]. Carcinogenesis was, after all, her specialty.

In a welcome move for unions and activists, Bingham instituted the New Directions health and safety training program for workers across the country and for a few years it prospered and was hailed by workplace health and safety activists. “I had become convinced that education of workers was extraordinarily important. I guess it was instinct. And then I knew that workers didn’t know [about their hazardous exposures on the job].” Tony Mazzocchi reinforced her view of worker training based on the fact that OCAW, his union, already had a substantial training program of its own, which was unusual. She poured millions into educating workers and the program continued until the following Republican administration strangled it. In the meantime, however, OSHA distributed funds to unions and university-based training efforts and helped seed a strong program that some observers later viewed as the genesis of modern grassroots health and safety activism. Some health policy specialists interpreted the training effort
as a way to make workers the “eyes” and “ears” of OSHA in workplaces across the country, a way of compensating for the fact that OSHA was such a small agency with a limited number of inspectors [10]. To merely visit all of America’s workplaces, it would have taken OSHA years, it was estimated.

More long-lived than New Directions were some workplace rights actions. Bingham coupled the right to know the names of workplace chemicals with worker training. OSHA produced “a big” detailed regulation requiring labels on chemicals used in the workplace. Looking back, she now sees that as a mistake. She now believes that “the simpler you can make a regulation, the better off you are.” Simplicity makes a regulation easier to secure, implement, and defend. “If I were able to go back to that point in time . . . it would just be, ‘You have to label the chemical; you have to say the scientific name and the common name’ because [by doing so] it’s much more difficult for industry to object.”

On a related issue, when workers were tested through sampling or exams, OSHA held that they had a right to know about themselves—that is, a right to see their own medical records. Amazingly, she said, “the American Medical Association (AMA) filed against us [OSHA] on that: they didn’t think that workers had a right to see their own records.” The agency got sued over the issue in a Louisiana State Court where OSHA eventually prevailed. “How can you not let people know about what’s in their medical file that you found out about?” Bingham asked. “That was outrageous.” She introduced training, identifying the chemicals, and the right to know as practical policies “to help workers change their lives.”

Finally, Bingham had to battle with the administration and the legislature. The Carter years were a time of high inflation and business interests howled over the increased costs they said they incurred from new OSHA standards. Together, Marshall and Bingham battled over requirements for economic impact analyses of new standards and resisted other initiatives. “Business opposition to a revitalized OSHA quickly registered in the White House, which, in response, sent the Council on Wage and Price Stability, the Regulatory Analysis Review Group, and OMB [the Office of Management and Budget] to bring the
agency around” [8]. In the latter part of her term in office, OSHA’s emphasis moved away from protecting workers from diseases stemming from their job exposures (that is, occupational health) to re-doing rules that protected them from workplace accidents and unsafe job conditions that often led to injuries or death (that is, workplace safety) [3].

Carter lost his second presidential campaign. As Assistant Secretary of Labor Bingham prepared to return to Cincinnati, she was honored with the aforementioned Rockefeller Public Service Award. It had been well-earned. She had been prepared and she had worked hard, often for 17 hours a day. And she had had her successes. In a 1998 essay, Mazzocchi called her “probably the best assistant secretary of labor . . . that we [had] had” [11].

The political landscape ahead under President Ronald Reagan was worrisome. Bingham returned to the university in Cincinnati and saw it as “a sanctuary, a haven. That’s what it’s supposed to be in rough political times.” She put out feelers for funding, but word came back that it would be difficult to garner support from Reagan’s administrators. However, she had another option through a promise she’d made to become a visiting professor at Carlton College in Minnesota where Paul Wellstone, 9 years before capturing a Senate seat as a Democrat, was a faculty member who was informally known as “the professor of political activism” [12]. Bingham remembered her time there as “a wonderful experience and [it] opened my eyes to how you teach organizing and the kinds of things that Paul did. He and the faculty in political science were absolutely wonderful.”

In DC, meanwhile, the Reaganites withdrew the proposed rule requiring employers to label chemicals so that workers could identify the substances to which they were being exposed—what Bingham had called the “big regulation on labeling.” She and other activists challenged that development by traveling in Alaska, Minnesota, Michigan, and California to urge state legislators to put workplace chemical labeling in place if federal officials would not do so. Their campaign caught on. The labeling advocates argued, for example, that firemen needed to know what chemicals were stored in the factories to which they were called when fire erupted. Two years later, industry actually requested
a national labeling standard they had previously fought because they found compliance with so many different state-based rules too onerous.

In the meantime, the president of the University of Cincinnati offered Bingham the post as vice president of research and graduate studies. When she hesitated to accept, he urged her to take it as an interim appointment; a year later, she made it permanent. She also returned to a research lab and, with a friend, won a cooperative agreement from the EPA. Her activities shifted into environmental policy that emphasized toxics. With several others, she got NIOSH funding for a project for the Center to Protect Workers’ Rights that focused on how workers recalled their past exposures on the job. She collaborated with others on a similar project for NIOSH and conducted medical surveillance on nuclear workers who had done construction jobs for the Department of Energy. When the Exxon-Valdez spilled its oils into Alaska’s waters, Bingham responded to a request for help from the governor. By airplane and accompanied by EPA staffers, she surveyed the sites and saw clean-up workers coated with oil as they left the boats, although, “[w]e never could go very far because the companies had everything tied up.” On her team’s recommendation, workers there soon got more health and safety training because “it was a very bad situation.”

Through much of this time, Bingham also taught graduate and medical students. Eventually though, she wearied of the effort; she wanted students who prioritized class discussions and the students were distracted by “their cell phones and their Blackberries.” So she stopped. “There’s been a complete change in the way students look at what happened before 1980 and since 1980. Some of them understand the labor movement, but . . . the labor movement is less significant to the students [who] really are dealing with other issues. No Tony Mazzocchis out there, that’s for sure.”

Other changes over time have concerned her as a scientist. The early age at which some girls mature is one. “There’s something wrong with that,” Bingham said, “and I don’t think it’s a hereditary thing. I think we’ve got chemicals where they shouldn’t be, and I think that’s a really important issue.”

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Chemical pollution is her worst fear. “We are so polluting the earth with
chemicals [to such an extent] that I don’t know if we’ll be able to live on the planet,” she worried. “You think about endocrine disrupters, about chemicals in the water supply. This whole issue about a little bit here and a little bit there. Look at what the Centers for Disease Control know about what we’re carrying around as a body burden of chemicals. That’s what frightens me the most,” said the toxicologist who had learned early that very small doses of poisons can produce substantial harmful effects. She also cited as worrisome the “unbelievable” stress that so many workers face on their jobs.

Recycling and pollution prevention, of course, are important for environmental health and she pointed to the devalued and decreasing pathways of disseminating health and safety information as a major concern. The privatization of the Environmental Health Journal troubled her. “Where on earth are people going to go to get information? There’s junk on the internet and [what’s] in the newspapers is slanted, maybe the wrong way. You have to deliver [to the citizenry] all that science that you’re doing. NIOSH used to have a system of letting workers or anybody know what was toxic, and they’ve done away with it. There needs to be some kind of filter or emphasis put on certain things.”

American workers nevertheless have come a long way. “The average American worker,” she said, “is so much better informed and wants to know about what he or she is doing. That’s a big change. I’ve walked through plants in the last two or three years and workers will tell you, ‘It’s a solvent and we’ve had problems with this or that,’ and they’ll know the solvent. Workers, and particularly organized workers, are very well informed about their workplaces and about the hazards and the adverse health effects.” She acknowledged though that she had not anticipated the changes in the world’s work force that have occurred through globalization, the development of the internet, and other forces over the last two decades. “It’s a revolution, what we’re seeing.”

To produce environmental change, Bingham said, it may be necessary to give The movement “roots” by enlisting children. “They have to grow up reading about it, knowing about it, and, of course, that means we have to get to their parents.”

Bingham also attached great importance to the actions of the European Union (EU), whose demands could help set world-wide standards. Her thoughts turned
to OSHA again. If OSHA was strong, “coming out and setting standards and leading the way, it would help . . . sort of like the EU is doing, but you don’t see that. Certainly neither political party has put anyone in positions to do anything, either at EPA or OSHA.”

OSHA inspectors and national office-holders “can do a lot” when the conditions are right. “If you’re put in a position [in which] you do have the power, you can save more lives than the average physician,” said Bingham, who saw—and helped—it happen. This statesperson scientist—whose scientific work met the needs of her time just as the world grew suspicious of chemical harms—speaks from experience at the intersection of science, politics, and life-saving social justice action.

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