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# United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON  
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS

WASHINGTON, DC 20510-8250

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May 4, 1990

The Honorable James D. Watkins  
Secretary of Energy  
1000 Independence Avenue S.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Watkins:

I am writing to bring an important matter to your attention regarding the conduct of the Department of Energy in the Marshall Islands. Between 1946 and 1958, the United States detonated 66 nuclear weapons at the Bikini and Enewetak atolls in the Marshall Islands. Since the late 1950's, the DOE and its predecessor, the Atomic Energy Commission, have been addressing the health and environmental problems created by the testing program.

It has come to my attention that on March 23, 1982, then-DOE Secretary James Edwards was presented with a memorandum requesting that the Marshall Islands health and environmental research program be transferred from DOE's Office of Environmental Protection, Safety and Emergency Preparedness to DOE's Defense Programs. The memo, which I am enclosing, was prepared by the Assistant Secretary for Defense Programs and stated that the DOE's Defense Programs should:

" assume the policy direction and control of the DOE's Marshall Islands activities as a single coherent program..." because "...the technical resources that are in use in the Marshall Islands are largely weapons-program related, and most of the DOE's logistic and support base is common to the Safeguard 'C' readiness program. Safeguard 'C' is one of the four safeguards of the Nuclear Test Ban Treaty and requires the U.S. to maintain the capability to resume atmospheric weapons testing. In fact, much of the field effort in the Marshall Islands is an exercise of the expeditionary capability which is an important aspect of Defense Programs' Safeguard 'C'."

Because the Marshall Islands health and environmental research program has been the only such program under the

*Henry Brown's File*

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direct control of DOE's nuclear weapons bureaucracy, the potential for conflict of interest is greatly enhanced. You are to be commended for your prompt follow-up to the recommendations of the Secretarial Panel for the Evaluation of Epidemiological Research Activities (SPEERA) which, among other things, recommended that the Marshall Islands environmental and health research program be taken out of DOE's Defense Programs and transferred to the new Office of Health and Environment. However, this memo raises several important questions and potentially serious problems regarding the credibility of the DOE and the United States in the Pacific Basin region.

It is my understanding that "Safeguard C" was one of four safeguards recommended by the Joint Chiefs of Staff before Congress in 1963 as necessary for the implementation of the Limited Test Ban Treaty. The capability under "Safeguard C" to conduct nuclear weapons tests in the atmosphere was first attained by the Atomic Energy Commission and the Defense Department in 1965.

Over the years, this capability has been upgraded through the National Nuclear Test Readiness Program. However, the status of this program currently and at the time of the 1982 memo to Secretary Edwards is unknown to me. In this regard, did the DOE have a nuclear test readiness program in the Marshall Islands at the time of the 1982 memo? Also, is there a current contingency to resume atmospheric nuclear weapons tests in: (a) the Marshall Islands; and (b) other locations? Does the United States have funding, manpower and materiel currently committed to the implementation of "Safeguard C?" If so, please specify.

Obviously, DOE Secretary Edwards approved transfer of the Marshall Islands health and environmental research program to Defense Programs. Specifically, what is the relevance of the Brookhaven National Laboratory medical support program, the management of the DOE's Marshall Islands research vessel, the Mid-Pacific Research Laboratory and the Lawrence-Livermore Laboratory's terrestrial environmental studies and marine programs to the application of "Safeguard C", as referenced in the 1982 memo?

Finally, were the Departments of State and Interior and the relevant Committees of Congress informed about the application of "Safeguard C" during the negotiations of the Compact of Free Association with the Marshall Islands and the subsequent approval process by the Congress? Between 1984 and 1985, the Congress held several hearings. According to Section 314 of the Compact of Free Association (P.L. 99-239), "unless otherwise agreed the United States shall not

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in the Marshall Islands...test by detonation or dispose of any nuclear weapon..."

According to the official documents of the status negotiations, this language was specifically agreed to in January 1980 by the United States and the Marshall Islands and was incorporated in subsequent versions. I find it disturbing that the DOE official in charge of the nuclear weapons program was advocating a contingency plan to resume atmospheric nuclear weapons testing in the Marshall Islands, some two years after the U.S. agreed to ban such tests during the Compact negotiations.

As you know, this problem was brought out by the people of the Rongelap Atoll in the Marshall Islands. In 1954, they were exposed to high radiation fallout doses from a nuclear weapons test, known as "Bravo." Since that time, the DOE has been studying the health effects of this unfortunate tragedy and is supposed to be providing medical assistance. A significant increase in thyroid problems and an unusual leukemia death among Rongelap children has been reported. During this period, a great deal of mistrust of the DOE has accumulated by the people of Rongelap. In 1985, they fled their homeland after a DOE study indicated that the Rongelap Atoll was about as contaminated as Bikini and Eniwetok, where the weapons were detonated.

In response to their plight, the Congress added a provision to the Compact of Free Association in 1986, authorizing an independent and comprehensive environmental assessment of Rongelap Atoll. A "phase I" assessment has been done which, unfortunately, raises more questions than it answers.

I am gratified that you announced in the fall of last year that the DOE is taking a fresh look at the Rongelap situation. Given these circumstances, I respectfully request that you support an independent "Phase II" assessment of the radiological contamination of the Rongelap Atoll and to provide humanitarian assistance so that the people of Rongelap may resettle in a place where they can get access to food and medical care. This will go a long way towards restoring DOE's credibility and that of the United States in this important region of the world.

Sincerely,



John Glenn  
Chairman

Attachment

TOTAL P.07

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY  
MEMORANDUM

DP-224.2

ACTION: Marshall Islands Programs

The Secretary  
Deputy Secretary  
Under Secretary

PROBLEM:

Whether the Secretary should transfer the Marshall Islands programs from the Office of Environmental Protection, Safety, and Emergency Preparedness (EP) to Defense Programs (DP).

URGENCY:

A prompt decision is recommended so that the programs will continue uninterrupted during status negotiations between the United States (U.S.) and the government of the Marshall Islands concerning the Compact of Free Association.

BACKGROUND:

The U.S. tested 66 nuclear weapons at the Pacific Proving Grounds of Bikini and Eniwetok atolls in the Marshall Islands from 1946 to 1959. These islands sustained damage from the detonations as well as from radioactive contamination. The peoples of these two atolls were relocated by the U.S. Government to other areas in the Marshall Islands prior to the tests. The resulting social and technical problems in the Marshall Islands are the legacy of the atmospheric test program.

Starting in early 1972 with the gradual resettlement of Bikini, the involvement and responsibilities of the Department of Energy (DOE), then the Atomic Energy Commission, began to escalate. The DOE was tasked to conduct a radiological resurvey of Bikini (spring 1972) and to conduct a massive radiological cleanup survey of Eniwetok. During this same time, Micronesian Legal Services Corporation (MLSC) challenged both the DOE and the Department of Defense in Federal court as the legal representative of the Eniwetok people.

The master plan for Eniwetok resettlement, a major radiological resurvey of Bikini, the Bikini lawsuit brought by MLSC, the acquisition of the DOE Marshall Islands Research Vessel, Liktanur, all occurred in 1974-1975. From 1975 to 1977, the Brookhaven National Laboratory (BNL) medical program, established in 1954 in response to the fallout victims of Rongelap and Utirik atolls, began to expand. An agricultural research program was established by Lawrence Livermore National Laboratory (LLNL) for the DOE at Eniwetok. The Mid-Pacific Research Laboratory (established in 1947) was placed under Nevada Operations Office (NY) administration.

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