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COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

November 21, 1989

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The Honorable James D. Watkins
Secretary of Energy
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Mr. *Secretary*

I want to express my appreciation for your commitment to take a "fresh look" at the issue of the radiation contamination of the islands and people of Rongelap Atoll in the Marshall Islands. It is, without question, long overdue.

As Deputy Assistant Secretary Meinhardt concluded his presentation of your Department's statement at the Subcommittee's hearing on this matter, it prompted one Member, the Honorable Ben Blaz, to comment "it looks as if we might actually get something done." I believe that sentiment is shared by all Members of the Subcommittee.

The question pending is: will the comprehensive study of Rongelap, required by the Compact of Free Association Act of 1985 [Public Law 99-239, Section 103(i)], be undertaken? Both the Rongelap people and the Government of the Marshall Islands have formally endorsed the study.

The Rongelap Atoll Local Government, in an effort to demonstrate its seriousness about the matter, contracted for the preparation of a work plan which sets forth the specific issues to be addressed. The Rongelap people, with the preparation of "A Statement of Unresolved Issues", wanted their government, the Administration, and the Congress to know precisely what issues would be examined. Rongelap has furnished copies to your staff.

The Subcommittee believes Rongelap has undertaken a positive and constructive approach to this matter by taking this step.

If the Department's review is to be credible, it is my strong recommendation that you include Senator Jeton Anjain, the leader of the Rongelap people as a working partner. The record developed by the Subcommittee demonstrates that exclusion of Rongelap is likely to perpetuate, rather than resolve, the matter.

John Reddolph's Files
Leftover Files
Letters - Marshall Islands 1989

Honorable James Watkins
November 21, 1989
page 2

The following are five questions which I believe the Department should address in its promised review of this matter.

(1) The purpose of the Department of Energy's 1982 Report, The Meaning of Radiation for Those Atolls in the Northern Part of the Marshall Islands That Were Surveyed in 1978, was to provide the peoples of various atolls in the Marshall Islands, including Rongelap, with "a complete and comprehensive radiological survey," so, as the Trust relationship between the U.S. and the Marshall Islands ended, the Rongelap people could make informed decisions about their future. See An Aerial Radiological and Photographic Survey of Eleven Atolls and Two Islands Within the Northern Marshall Islands, EG&G, Tipton and Meibaum, at page 7. Does the Department believe the DOE 1982 Report fulfilled this stated purpose?

(2) When the Rongelap people were asked during negotiations on the Compact to make judgments and decisions about (a) the Compact and (b) the safety and habitability of Rongelap Atoll, did DOE fully disclose a complete radiological and health profile of the lands, environment, and people?

(3) During the period in which the Compact was being reviewed by Congress, did the DOE fully disclose all relevant information regarding the safety and habitability of Rongelap Atoll to this Committee and to the Congress?

(4) In the 35 years since the Bravo test, has there ever been a comprehensive radiological survey of Rongelap Atoll?

(5) In the same three-decade period, has there ever been any radiological cleanup of any kind on Rongelap Atoll?

Based upon the Subcommittee's review of this matter, I doubt that any of these five questions can be answered affirmatively. You, however, should now review them and make your own determination.

In addition to these questions, I direct your attention to the statement of Senator Anjain at last week's hearing. In it, the Rongelap people assert that DOE has in the past: opposed the independent review; violated standards of medical ethics; and had a structural conflict-of-interest in its Defense Programs division of the Department's handling of this matter.

Honorable James Watkins
November 21, 1989
page 3

It is my hope that the Department will review this matter as expeditiously as possible. The Department should adhere to a timetable that would enable it to include in your FY 1991 budget submissions in January whatever recommendations you ultimately make.

Your willingness to take a "fresh look" is applauded. The Subcommittee recognizes that your decision to undertake such an examination is an act of political courage.

At the completion of Deputy Assistant Secretary Meinhardt's statement, I asked Senator Anjain for his reaction. He immediately pledged his full cooperation.

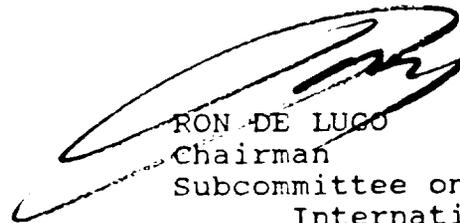
The significance should not be overlooked. A long, difficult and strained history preceded that brief, but highly significant, exchange.

Together, we have initiated a process that will, hopefully, finally address and resolve a most difficult issue.

In closing, I would like to request that the Department furnish the Subcommittee with a copy of the proposed review plan and timetable for consideration of this matter as soon as it is available.

With thanks in advance for your attention to and cooperation with this request, I am

Sincerely,



RON DE LUGO
Chairman
Subcommittee on Insular and
International Affairs

cc: Honorable Manuel Lujan, Jr.