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COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

October 23, 1989

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

Dear Mr. Secretary:

The Subcommittee on Insular and International Affairs on November 16 will conduct an oversight hearing on the health of the Rongelap people as well as any outstanding issues regarding the safety and habitability of Rongelap Atoll in the Marshall Islands pursuant to Public Law 99-239. The hearing will begin at 9:45 AM in a room to be announced later.

I cordially invite you to testify at this hearing.

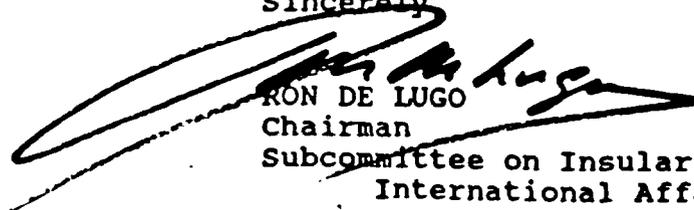
Please have the Subcommittee staff informed no later than November 1 whether you will be able to testify at this hearing in person or will do so through a representative. The Subcommittee staff office is located in Room 1626 of the Longworth House Office Building, telephone number (202) 225-9297.

I have attached a list of questions which I request DOE witnesses to address in their prepared statement for this hearing. Any additional documents or supplementary materials can be attached to the Department's statement. While the statement to be submitted can be of any length, the Rules of the Committee require witnesses to briefly summarize their statements.

The Rules also require written statements to be submitted at least 24 hours prior to the hearing. Please have 50 copies of the statement delivered to the Subcommittee staff office by this deadline.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



RON DE LUGO
Chairman
Subcommittee on Insular and
International Affairs

Attachment

Executive Secretariat files

The Compact of Free Association Act of 1985 mandated a special review 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." That review was to determine the adequacy of DOE data in that report and also determine whether or not the DOE conclusions as to habitability of Rongelap were "fully supported" by the DOE data.

The first step was to review the DOE Report. If the data were found not to be adequate or the conclusions were not "fully supported" by the data, then a comprehensive and independent study of Rongelap was to be undertaken. Such a review called the Rongelap Reassessment Project Report was prepared by Dr. Henry I. Kohn and completed in July of 1988. A "Corrected Edition" was issued March 1, 1989.

The Rongelap people are now asking that the Phase 2 study provided for in the Compact be initiated.

(1) Please provide the Committee with a detailed analysis of the Rongelap Reassessment Project report prepared by Dr. Kohn on July 22, 1988, and March 1, 1989.

(A) Does DOE agree with the reports?

(B) Does DOE agree or disagree with the conclusions and recommendations of the reports? Please be specific.

(C) Are there any sections of the reports or discussions of issues which DOE believes to be inaccurate or otherwise incomplete?

(2) Please provide the Subcommittee with detailed comments and analysis on the proposed work plan, "Making Rongelap Habitable," for the Phase 2 study which was prepared for the Rongelap people.

(A) Is the work plan sufficiently comprehensive?

(B) Please identify any deficiencies in the proposed work plan and/or any DOE suggestions to improve it.

(3) Since the weapons testing began, please describe any cleanup efforts that have been undertaken at Rongelap Atoll.

(A) Did DOE formulate and implement a cleanup plan for Rongelap Atoll? Please provide details.

(B) Does DOE believe that any cleanup is required today?

(4) Please inform the Subcommittee when DOE began testing the Rongelap citizens for plutonium or other transuranics. Specifically:

(A) When was testing of the Rongelap people for plutonium and/or other transuranics first initiated by DOE?

(B) Which offices or divisions within DOE and its laboratories did the testing? Brookhaven? Lawrence Livermore? Any other?

(C) Did the DOE and the Brookhaven National Laboratory research scientists inform their patients of this medical research? If so, when?

(D) Dr. Kohn reported that some 270 Rongelap urine samples with plutonium weren't tabulated or analyzed because of a funding disruption and a reorganization. Are there any other similar urine samples that went untested? Please provide details.

(5) We understand that the U. S. government is cleaning up Johnston Atoll in the Pacific for plutonium to a level far more stringent than for Rongelap.

(A) Is the U. S. government cleaning up Johnston Atoll to a standard different from Rongelap? If so, why?

(B) What is the standard or cleanup guide being used at Johnston Atoll?

(C) If this standard were applied throughout Rongelap Atoll, what would be the implications?

(6) The DOE is entering into agreements with various communities in America to clean up nuclear contaminated sites in Hanford, Washington, Rocky Flats, Colorado, and Fernauld, Ohio.

(A) What is the standard or cleanup guide to be used at these various sites?

(B) For cesium and strontium?

(C) For plutonium and other transuranics?

(7) The DOE survey in 1978 calculated the amount of plutonium in the soil at Rongelap Atoll, but this information was not included in the DOE report.

(A) Why weren't data and information about plutonium in the bodies of Rongelap citizens included in the 1982 bilingual report?

(B) If you were to compare the soil of Rongelap Island with the soil of the northern hemisphere, what amount of plutonium would be in the former as compared to the latter?

(C) How many times greater is the amount of plutonium

in the northern islands of Rongelap Atoll as compared to the soils of the northern hemisphere?

(8) The Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), in its "Interim Recommendations on Doses to Persons Exposed to Transuranium Elements in the General Environment," states, in part:

"Remedial actions should accomplish a permanent, rather than short-term, reduction in the potential risk to persons in the general population. Restrictions on occupancy or land use should not be relied on to provide the necessary protection to future generations."

(A) Does DOE agree with the EPA recommended guide?

(B) Dr. Kohn, in his report, conditions "habitability" of Rongelap "Island" upon the use of the USDA imported food program. Given the EPA explanation above, wouldn't such a condition in effect be considered a "restriction" and therefore not reliable in determining habitability?

(9) DOE in the 1982 Bilingual Report concluded that the "dose" for the Rongelap people was within the U.S. guideline (5 rem/30 years). Dr. Kohn, in the Rongelap Reassessment Report, concludes that the Rongelap people will not receive more than 3.5 rems in the coming 30 years.

However, some of the Rongelap people (about 15-20% of the population) have received a dose of 190 rems more than that 30 year dose already.

(A) Does DOE agree that some of the Rongelap people have already received radiation doses of 190 rems or more to date?

(B) Does DOE agree that these specific individuals have already exceeded the U. S. guideline?

(C) If some of the Rongelap people have exceeded the U.S. guideline, how does DOE justify its determination that Rongelap Atoll is safe.

(10) The Rongelap people have asked, "Is Rongelap Atoll safe?" The subcommittee believes this is a fair and responsible question.

(A) Does DOE believe that Rongelap Atoll is safe?

(B) Is it safe for all Rongelap citizens without exception, young and old, male and female, those who were exposed to the Bravo shot and those who were not?