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United States Senate

Statement of Jeff Bingaman, U.S. Senator New Mexico at the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Public Scoping Hearing for LES, March 4, 2004

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Press and Director's
Branch
USNRC

I wish to thank the Nuclear Regulatory Commission for holding this public scoping hearing today and I welcome all the participants to this event.

I support the LES project because I think it will provide jobs and an economic opportunity for southeastern New Mexico. But the people of New Mexico need to know that the proposed plant will be safe, that it will not pose a threat to their health and safety, that it will not harm the environment, and that they will not be left with the plant's wastes. I commend the NRC for holding this meeting to listen to people's concerns and to explain how it intends to address them. Only by addressing their concerns and showing the people of New Mexico that the plant will be safe and will work to their advantage, will the project succeed.

In that regard, legitimate questions have been raised regarding the safe and secure storage and ultimate removal from New Mexico of the left over uranium hexafluoride material, or "tails" from the enrichment operation over the lifetime of the plant's operation.

I understand that LES' preferred option is to contract with a private firm to convert the tails to uranium oxide and sell the byproduct fluoride gas on the commercial market. I encourage LES to continue along this path, and to assure the state and its citizens, that the private conversion option is contractually committed by the time the decision is made by LES to begin operation of the enrichment plant. I remain committed to help facilitating, where necessary, this private conversion option.

I wish to commend the LES for their open door policy with my office, and I continue to look forward to our interaction as this project moves forward.

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