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Re: Supplemental Statement of Paul Gunter to the National Academies

Dear Kevin:

Thank you for forwarding the letter from Paul Gunter in which he supplements the attack that he made on me in his public comments at the recent meeting of the Nuclear and Radiation Safety Board ("NRSB"). As you know, he claims in his letter that I have conflicts of interest that should foreclose my involvement in the proposed study of cancer cases in the vicinity of nuclear facilities licensed by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission ("NRC").

Mr. Gunter cites various activities in which I am engaged that touch on the nuclear industry. There are various errors in his discussion, but, aside from his discussion of the op-ed in *The Washington Post*, these probably are not material for present purposes. Suffice it to say, all of these matters have been fully disclosed to the Academies by me on my conflict of interest form and in the discussion of bias and conflicts that was held at the recent meeting.

Much of Mr. Gunter's letter and his attack on me at the NRSB meeting focus on the op-ed that I wrote for the Earth Day supplement to *The Washington Post*. Mr. Gunter claims that my submission was not solicited by the *Post* and was part of an advertising and lobbying activity for the nuclear industry. In fact, one of my staff at the Carnegie Institution was contacted by a representative of the *Post*. In an email to me, my staff member stated that the *Post* representative indicated that she was "working on a special section to run April 21 in connection with Earth Day. She would like a 700-800 word op-ed on the current status and future prospects of nuclear power as an energy source." Needless to say, I agreed to draft the op-ed and did so. I did not pay for the publication of this item and was not paid to prepare it.

Mr. Gunter's excerpts from the op-ed in his letter have been carefully selected to advance his argument. (I attach the full text.) The op-ed, but not Mr. Gunter's selective quotation from it, emphasizes that the full range of carbon-free energy sources must be exploited and that none should be prematurely excluded. The op-ed then focuses on nuclear power, exactly as I was requested to do. But the

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op-ed emphasizes that nuclear power “will not be acceptable if the plants are not built and operated to meet high safety standards and to provide strong security.”

My op-ed was part of a segment in the *Post* that included op-eds by, among others, Lisa Jackson, the Administrator of EPA; Marchant Wentworth, an official with the Union of Concerned Scientists; and Rick Fedrizzi, the President of the US Green Building Council. Given the company in which my submission appears and Mr. Gunter’s distortion of it, I can only conclude Mr. Gunter’s over-the-top claims are designed to advance his agenda, rather than the truth.

Moreover, Mr. Gunter’s letter does not acknowledge what he was told at the NRSB meeting – namely, that the board does not control the selection of committee members who will undertake the study, the content of the study, or its eventual review. The NRSB merely serves to facilitate the launch and progress of the study but cannot really control its course or conclusions.

Mr. Gunter is a director of an organization, Beyond Nuclear, with the mission “to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future.” See <http://www.beyondnuclear.org/> I interpret Mr. Gunter’s attack on me as a sort of anchor to windward to establish the foundation to attack the Academies’ study in the future in the event that it, like the previous study by the National Cancer Institute, ultimately does not advance his cause.

As a result, I have concluded that I should voluntarily recuse myself from further involvement in the NRC Cancer study. I want to avoid a misguided attack on the report of the type that Mr. Gunter is obviously prepared to launch. I do not think that I will be derelict in fulfilling my responsibilities to the NRSB in recusing myself because, as you know, I have tended to defer in any event to members of the NRSB who have relevant expertise on health-related studies and because my term as chair of the NRSB will end long before even the first phase of the study is complete. It would be better to vest those with continuing engagement with the study with the NRSB’s limited responsibility for it.

I hope that this course of action acceptable to you. Please contact me if you have any questions.

Very truly yours,



Richard A. Meserve

Enclosure

cc: Congressman Edward Markey
Chairman Greg Jaczko ✓

U.S. Cannot Dismiss Nuclear Energy in Quest to Control Global Warming

By Richard A. Meserve, *President, Carnegie Institution for Science*

Fossil fuels – coal, oil and natural gas – meet 85 percent of the United States' energy needs. They also release into the atmosphere the bulk of the greenhouse gases that lead to global warming. If we are to limit climate change, the United States (and the rest of the world) will have to restructure its energy system to reduce dependence on these fuels.

We could achieve such a change by increasing our reliance on wind, solar energy, biomass, hydro- and geothermal power, nuclear power, coal and natural gas. We can couple that with carbon capture and sequestration, to prevent carbon dioxide from being released into the atmosphere, and greatly increase efficiency.

Given the immensity of the energy transition that is required, probably all these technologies will be necessary. None should be prematurely excluded.

Of these potential sources of climate-friendly energy, only nuclear is a significant contributor today. It provides about 20 percent of our electrical power. Moreover, unlike several of the technologies, nuclear is ready for deployment now.

Any plants likely to be built in the next several years will be evolutionary designs – safer versions of plants that are operating around the world. Nuclear power also has a significant advantage because it provides base-load electricity – it is available regardless of whether the sun is shining or the wind is blowing. As a result, our national energy policy should (indeed, must) include significant encouragement of nuclear power.

Nonetheless, nuclear power does present challenges. It will not be acceptable if the plants are not built and operated to meet high safety standards and to provide strong security. Fortunately, the recent record of nuclear power in the U.S. and around the world shows that safety is steadily improving. Security requirements also have been significantly upgraded in the aftermath of the Sept. 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. As a result, nuclear power plants are far more secure than most of our civilian infrastructure.

Currently, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission has before it applications for construction and operation of 26 nuclear power units, or reactors, at 17 sites. Several of the applications are being held in abeyance, however, and no doubt many will not proceed to construction anytime soon.

The major challenge – and it is a very serious one – is financial. Although nuclear power plants are inexpensive to operate, they are very expensive

to build. Financing in these challenging economic times is difficult, and Wall Street will seek a larger return on investments in light of the cost overruns and extended delays that plagued nuclear construction in the 1980s.

Given the societal importance of demonstrating that new nuclear plants can be built on budget and on schedule and that they can perform economically, there is a clear federal role in supporting the first several plants. This can be accomplished by providing loan guarantees in which the utilities pay a premium (known as a "subsidy cost") that reflects the financial risk assumed by the government. The Department of Energy has issued the first such guarantee for the construction of two nuclear reactors at a site in Georgia and at least one more guarantee is said to be imminent. The department is seeking money for further guarantees as part of its fiscal 2011 budget proposal.

This funding should be a high priority if we are to facilitate the significant new construction that will be necessary if nuclear power is to contribute meaningfully toward halting the growth of greenhouse gas emissions.

Another challenge is how to dispose of used fuel, a highly radioactive material. The Obama administration has recently withdrawn a longstanding application for a disposal site at Yucca Mountain in Nevada, and Energy Secretary Steven Chu has formed the Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future to assess the options for the disposition of used fuel. (I serve on the commission.)

Although the pathway for the disposal of used fuel is uncertain, this is not reason to halt new nuclear construction. The used fuel can be safely and securely stored for many decades in dry casks. In the meantime, research and development may reveal how to handle the fuel in ways that reduce the challenge of disposal, as well as to extend fuel supply and to lessen proliferation risks.

And if that is not fruitful, numerous assessments show that deep geologic disposal can isolate the used fuel from the environment for the necessary long period of time.

Nuclear power is an essential component of our energy future. We should encourage the construction of nuclear plants so that reductions in greenhouse gas emissions can be achieved. ■

Meserve is the former Chairman of the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission. For more information, go to www.ciw.edu.