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April 5, 1979

Hdqtrs. PDR

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The Honorable Joseph M. Hendrie  
Chairman  
United States Nuclear Regulatory  
Commission  
1717 H Street, N. W.  
Washington, D. C. 20555

Dear Chairman Hendrie:

In my earlier letter to you, I expressed concern that contractor-employed inspectors on nuclear power plant projects may be under considerable pressure to approve work that is only marginally adequate, owing to the immense amounts of money involved, and owing to pressures to meet completion schedules. In light of information I have received in the past day or two, I want to elaborate upon this, and raise some specific questions.

My understanding is that the Commission conducts independent inspections of nuclear power plant design and construction, and issues licenses on the basis of those independent inspections. I had always assumed that this meant that the NRC inspectors are Government employees. I have been told that in many cases, if not always, the NRC inspections are conducted by contractors employed by the Commission for that purpose. Is that correct?

I have been told that some or all NRC inspections at Three Mile Island were conducted by a contractor. Is that correct?

I have also been told that NRC inspections at the South Texas Nuclear Project are done by contract personnel. Is that correct?

In each case, if contract personnel were employed to act in behalf of the NRC, would you kindly provide me the name of the firm(s) you contracted with?

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The Hon. Joseph M. Hendrie  
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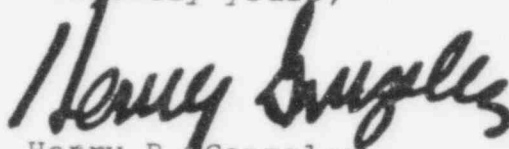
April 5, 1979

It has been suggested to me that marginally safe construction items were approved at Three Mile Island, perhaps because there was disagreement as to the problems involved, but perhaps also because there was considerable pressure to get the plant on line by December 31, 1978. News reports indicate that a rate increase of \$47 million depended upon meeting the December 31 date, which indeed was done.

My concern is that the Commission must assure itself that inspections are performed by capable, independent persons who are insulated from the financial interests and pressures involved with construction of nuclear power plants. There can be no dispute that the safety record to date of these plants has been enviable; but neither can there be any dispute that safety depends ultimately on the integrity of your inspection and regulatory system.

With best wishes, I am

Sincerely yours,



Henry B. Gonzalez  
Member of Congress