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# TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON THE ACCIDENT AT THREE MILE ISLAND

PUBLIC HEARING

TUESDAY,  
August 21, 1979

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1 PRESIDENT'S COMMISSION ON THE ACCIDENT AT THREE MILE ISLAND

2  
3 PUBLIC HEARING

4  
5 TUESDAY,  
6 August 21, 1979

7 Hall of Nations  
8 Edmund Walsh Building  
9 Georgetown University  
10 36th Street, N.W.  
11 Washington, D.C.

12 The hearing was convened pursuant to notice at 9:07 a.m.

13 John G. Kemeny, Chairman, presiding.

14 PARTICIPANTS:

15 John G. Kemeny  
16 President  
17 Dartmouth College

18 Bruce Babbitt  
19 Governor of Arizona

20 Patrick E. Haggerty  
21 Retired President  
22 Texas Instruments

23 Carolyn Lewis  
24 Associate Professor of Journalism  
25 Graduate School of Journalism  
26 Columbia University

27 Paul E. Marks  
28 Vice President for Health Sciences  
29 Columbia University

30 Cora B. Marrett  
31 Associate Professor of Sociology  
32 University of Wisconsin

33 Lloyd McBride  
34 President  
35 United Steelworkers of America

36 Harry McPherson  
37 Attorney

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PARTICIPANTS: (continued)

Russell Peterson  
President  
Audubon Society

Theodore Taylor  
Professor of Aerospace and  
Mechanical Science  
Princeton University

Anne Trunk  
Resident of Middletown, Pennsylvania

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C O N T E N T S .

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WITNESS:

Richard Thornburgh - Governor of Pennsylvania

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GREENWOOD

P R O C E E D I N G S

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CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Will the meeting please come to order?

This is the beginning of the sixth set of public hearings by the President's Commission on the Accident at Three Mile Island. I have been asked to make an announcement that the air-conditioning has been turned on fairly recently. So, we hope we will have some relief from the heat in here before very long.

Would Counsel Harvey please call a witness this morning?

MR. HARVEY: Governor Thornburgh, please?

CHAIRMAN KEMENY: And would you please swear him in?

Whereupon,

RICHARD THORNBURGH

was called as a witness and, after being first duly sworn, was examined and testified as follows:

CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Governor, may I just ask you to state for the record your full name and your elected position?

GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I am Dick Thornburgh, Governor of the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania.

CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Thank you.

Counsel Harvey?

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1 MR. HARVEY: Governor, during our last hearings we  
 2 heard from several witnesses concerning the events leading  
 3 to your advisory on March 30, to recommend that pregnant  
 4 women and pre-school children leave the area within a five-mile  
 5 radius, and we would like to pick up that thread, if we could,  
 6 today, by getting your perspective on those events.

7 I might note that from the Lieutenant-Governor we  
 8 heard that on Wednesday, March 23, there was a process of  
 9 trying to acquire information concerning what was happening  
 10 at the site, and as he described that process, he told us  
 11 on Thursday that there was a decision made that he should  
 12 go to the site and personally inspect conditions at the site.

13 Was that decision to send the Lieutenant-Governor  
 14 on Thursday to the Three Mile Island Plant made in consultation  
 15 with you?

16 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes, it was.

17 MR. HARVEY: Could you describe the considerations  
 18 that led to having the Lieutenant-Governor visit the plant?

19 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I think there are probably  
 20 two considerations that went into that decision.

21 First of all, by that time, approximately 30 hours  
 22 or so had elapsed since we had first been notified of the  
 23 incident, and we were becoming increasingly concerned about  
 24 the reliability of various sources of information which would  
 25 provide a factual basis for us carrying out our responsibilities

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1 and making whatever decisions were necessary to look after the  
2 health and safety of the people of the area, and part of our  
3 concern was what kind of atmosphere existed at the site.  
4 Were we being given information by people who were in command  
5 of the situation? Was there any degree of panic or  
6 irrationality at the site among employees and others who were  
7 there, and it seemed to me that the Lieutenant-Governor who  
8 had been actively supervising most of the state activities  
9 during the first day or so was well-qualified to go and give  
10 me a reading as to precisely what the atmosphere was there.

11 Secondly, I think there was a representational  
12 aspect to it, that is to say in view of the uncertainty and  
13 the possibility that people might perceive the situation to  
14 be other than it was on either the up side or the down side  
15 that the Lieutenant-Governor's presence there would indicate  
16 that at least there was not any concern about imminent  
17 catastrophe.

18 In both those considerations I think the visit  
19 served its purpose. The Lieutenant-Governor was able to  
20 report to me that there was an air of calm, although concern  
21 at the site, and his presence there, I think, did give some  
22 confidence to the people who were apprised of it that there  
23 was not any threat of imminent catastrophic event.

24 MR. HARVEY: Following the Lieutenant-Governor's  
25 visit to the site, you held a press conference that afternoon



1 on Thursday and reported to the people of Central Pennsylvania  
2 your sense of what the conditions were at the site.

3           Could you give us an indication of the kind of  
4 attitude you tried to convey at that press conference?

5           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: From the outset we had tried  
6 to acquaint the public through the news media with whatever  
7 we had in the way of firm fact with regard to the conditions  
8 at the site.

9           The Lieutenant-Governor had had three separate  
10 press conferences on Wednesday, March 28, and on Thursday  
11 there had been a press conference which was held ultimately  
12 at 5:15 in the afternoon, following his visit.

13           The purpose of the afternoon press conference on  
14 Thursday, March 29, was to indicate the results of his visit  
15 in the manner which I previously described, and at that time  
16 we, also, were available with officials of the NRC Regional  
17 Office and with people from our Department of Environmental  
18 Resources and Department of Health to answer questions as best  
19 we could on the basis of the information that we had that came  
20 from the press in general.

21           MR. HARVEY: At that press conference one of the  
22 representatives of the NRC reported that the danger to the  
23 people off site was over.

24           Can you describe your reaction to that statement  
25 at the press conference?

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1 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: My reaction to that statement  
2 really has to be looked at in the context of our constant  
3 desire to get a reliable reading on the facts out of the  
4 variety of sources that were available to us, and throughout  
5 Wednesday and Thursday we had been kind of testing the  
6 reliability of sources of information we had from the utility,  
7 from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Regional Office, from  
8 our own people, because I don't think I can adequately  
9 convey the frustration that we felt in trying to separate  
10 fact from fiction and acquaint the news media and the general  
11 public with the facts, because that we perceived to be one  
12 of the prime responsibilities that we had in our office.

13 The statement made toward the end of the press  
14 conference by one of the representatives of the NRC that the  
15 danger at the site was, or off-site danger was over jarred  
16 me a little bit, and I later found it really kind of concerned  
17 others because we simply did not have that kind of a factual  
18 basis for that conclusion, and I think that that really began  
19 the unraveling of the situation that took place on Thursday  
20 night, March 29, and culminated in the events of Friday,  
21 March 30.

22 We began to lose a little bit of our confidence in  
23 the information that we were getting and the characterizations  
24 that were being placed on the situation, and really caused  
25 quite a bit of concern to those who were with me and advising

1 me.

2 MR. HARVEY: What happened on Thursday night that  
3 caused you to lose confidence?

4 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: The next thing after this  
5 characterization of the problem being, off-site problem being  
6 over, we heard that there had been a discharge from the  
7 facility on Thursday afternoon of water which we had not been  
8 apprised of previously, and furthermore that there was a  
9 plant discharge to take place later that night which we were  
10 told required our approval.

11 Thereafter in the course of the evening, an official  
12 of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Regional Office called  
13 Paul Critchlow, my press secretary, and stated that he shared  
14 the misgivings about the rather optimistic view that had been  
15 expressed at the tail end of the press conference and that  
16 there really was a cause for concern about the status of the  
17 reactor facility, in particular that there was considerable  
18 concern about possible fuel damage and that the optimism that  
19 was exuded by his colleague at the press conference was  
20 perhaps a little bit overstated.

21 We felt that this kind of confirmed the general  
22 uneasiness we had about the reliability of the information  
23 we were getting at that time, and I went to bed that night  
24 fairly troubled about where we were going to look to determine  
25 precisely what was the situation at the reactor.

1 MR. HARVEY: Could you describe what happened on  
2 Friday morning after the events of Thursday?

3 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: On Friday morning I was  
4 up early because I had an interview at one of the television  
5 stations during which I think I betrayed the fact that I was  
6 troubled about the reliability of our information sources.

7 When I got to the office I was apprised immediately  
8 that the facility had reported an unplanned emission from  
9 the site, and at about 9:06 a.m., referring to my rough  
10 draft of the chronology of events, I learned from the  
11 Lieutenant-Governor that a Mr. Harold Collins of the Nuclear  
12 Regulatory Commission was recommending that we undertake an  
13 evacuation.

14 I did not know Mr. Collins. I never met him or  
15 heard of him, and I asked the Lieutenant-Governor to determine  
16 who Mr. Collins was and what his authority was for making such  
17 a recommendation. I, also, asked Paul Critchlow, my press  
18 secretary to confer with his counterpart who was in his office  
19 to determine who Mr. Collins was, whether this recommendation  
20 was in order.

21 I then talked to Colonel O. K. Henderson, the  
22 Director of our Emergency Management Agency to ask him what  
23 his appraisal was of this reported advice to evacuate, and  
24 by 10 o'clock, within the hour, I was sufficiently uncertain  
25 about the genesis of this recommendation that I placed a call

1 to Chairman Hendry of the NRC because by that time we felt  
2 that our reliable sources of information had just about dried  
3 up, and we had better talk to the Chairman about precisely  
4 what the situation was.

5 I placed that call to him around 10 o'clock, and  
6 spoke with him with regard to the need for evacuation, to  
7 verify whether or not Mr. Collins was authorized to recommend  
8 evacuation and whether or not, in fact, this recommendation,  
9 if it had been made was based on sufficient information to  
10 justify it.

11 MR. HARVEY: Could you describe the resolution of  
12 the issues you intended to raise with the Commissioner with  
13 that telephone call?

14 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: The first resolution was that  
15 we agreed or he advised that evacuation was not necessary.

16 He did recommend to us on the basis of conversations  
17 in the group that he was with that we recommend for people  
18 to stay inside until further notice.

19 I had mentioned to him on the basis of concerns  
20 that had been expressed previously during the preceding  
21 day whether there was any particular concern that we should  
22 be expressing with regard to pregnant women and pre-school  
23 children in the area in view of the release that had taken  
24 place the day before.

25 All of this, I believe, is -- it was on a speaker

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1 phone, and I think it is in the transcripts that have been  
2 made available by the NRC.

3           It was a brief conversation. I was satisfied that  
4 we had, from the Chairman, received assurances that whatever  
5 recommendation made by Mr. Collins was either unnecessary  
6 or had been obviated by further re-examination of the  
7 situation, and we resolved to keep in touch so that we had  
8 a reliable source.

9           During that conversation I expressed my concern  
10 to Mr. Hendry that we had been plagued by a variety of sources  
11 for information which seemed to be eroding so far as their  
12 respective credibilities went, and indicated that I would  
13 like to have some kind of central source for information  
14 that was necessary for us to utilize in making decisions  
15 about any planned evacuation, if it were necessary or other  
16 precautionary measures that we had to give to the people of  
17 Pennsylvania.

18           I think I said to him, "I am looking for one good  
19 man that I can rely upon to give us information that we could  
20 use in coming to decisions.

21           MR. HARVEY: As you hung up the phone from talking  
22 with Chairman Hendry, did you feel that the NRC had any  
23 better information or more control over the situation than  
24 you did?

25           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I was not terribly assured.

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1 I got a sense of the Chairman's frustration in our  
2 conversation as well, although it was not expressed directly  
3 to me.

4 I think that my impression was that they were just  
5 as concerned as I was about the reliability of information  
6 coming from the site.

7 MR. HARVEY: I take it that after your conversation  
8 with Chairman Hendry the President called. Can you tell us  
9 who initiated that call?

10 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: The call was initiated by  
11 President Carter, and according to our records was received  
12 about 11:15.

13 MR. HARVEY: Could you describe what took place  
14 during that conversation?

15 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: The first thing the President  
16 said was that he agreed that our decision to undertake no  
17 massive evacuation at the time was correct. He said that he  
18 thought we were doing the right thing. He had been clearly  
19 in touch with people at the NRC, and with Chairman Hendry.  
20 He stated that our communications problems had been brought  
21 to his attention, the difficulty in overloading of the  
22 regular telephone lines and our inability often to get through  
23 to the site and to other people upon whom we had to rely for  
24 information and stated that the Signal Corps would establish  
25 an appropriate communications systems between the White House,

1 the Three Mile Island facility and my office.

2 He stated that Jessica Tuckman Matthews of his  
3 staff had been assigned to represent him on TMI matters and  
4 finally that he was dispatching Mr. Harold Denton of the  
5 Nuclear Regulatory Commission as his personal representative  
6 to the site to meet my prescription of a reliable source  
7 for us to look to.

8 The conversation was not particularly lengthy. I  
9 stated to the President that I appreciated his interest and  
10 the fact that he had met some of the needs that I had stated  
11 both to him and to Chairman Hendry.

12 MR. HARVEY: I understand that after the President  
13 called, Chairman Hendry called again.

14 Could you describe that conversation?

15 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: He called me about one-half  
16 hour later, again, according to my records, indicated 11:40  
17 a.m., that we again raised, as we did constantly, with any  
18 source of information that we had, really, two questions  
19 that we were concerned about, one, what is the worst case  
20 foreseeable at that particular time, and what kind of lead  
21 time would we have with regard to that eventuality?

22 Those questions were important to us because we  
23 had to know from those who were technologically equipped to  
24 assess the situation precisely what we had to look for in the  
25 way of consequences of this accident, and by Friday morning, I



1 don't think we still had a good fix on that, but more  
2 importantly, we had to know how much time we had to activate  
3 our Civil Defense people with regard to any action that they  
4 had to undertake.

5 In that regard I raised again the question of  
6 evacuation because it had been planted in our minds rather  
7 firmly by Mr. Collins' recommendations earlier in the day, and  
8 after a rundown on the technology, the diagnosis of the  
9 present situation at the site, the Chairman stated that his  
10 recommendation at that time was that pregnant women and  
11 pre-school children should be advised to leave the area.

12 I, at that time, had had similar advice from  
13 Dr. Gordon McCloud, the Secretary of Health, based on his  
14 conversations with other health experts, and we determined  
15 as a result of that phone call that we would recommend that  
16 pregnant women and pre-school children within the five-mile  
17 radius surrounding the site leave the area until further  
18 notice.

19 MR. HARVEY: And that advisory was made at a press  
20 conference subsequent to the phone call?

21 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: That is right. The press  
22 conference according to my records was held about 12:30.  
23 The schools within that area were, also, recommended to be  
24 closed for logistical reasons, our thinking being that most  
25 of those who -- or there was a high likelihood that those with

1 pre-school children would have children in school as well,  
2 and rather than disrupt the whole schooling process by  
3 deciding which was supposed to be there and which wasn't, we  
4 recommended that those schools within that five-mile area  
5 be closed.

6 MR. HARVEY: Finally, Governor, I understand that  
7 on Friday the members of your staff talked with members of  
8 the White House staff concerning a declaration of emergency  
9 and whether or not such a declaration should be made.

10 Could you describe the considerations that went into  
11 not declaring such a state of emergency?

12 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes, following the President's  
13 conversation with me, there were a number of conversations  
14 made between, held between persons at the White House and  
15 their counterparts on my staff.

16 My Executive Assistant, Jay Waldman spoke with  
17 Jack Watson and Gene Eidenberg during the day. I think,  
18 according to my records he advised me of a conversation that  
19 was held at 4:30 on Friday afternoon respecting the  
20 declaration of an emergency.

21 Obviously we knew that a formal declaration of  
22 emergency under normal conditions would trigger a variety  
23 of responses from the Federal Government that might not be  
24 available in the absence of such a declaration, but the upshot  
25 of the conversation between Mr. Waldman and I believe Jack

1 Watson was that we would be assured in Pennsylvania of all  
2 available federal assistance, both during the incident and  
3 in the aftermath that we would get with a declaration of  
4 emergency and that the declaration of emergency at that  
5 particular time, being Friday afternoon March 30, might have  
6 a tendency to escalate the concern of the populace over what  
7 it should be based on the facts as we had them and become  
8 kind of a self-fulfilling prophecy.

9 We were constantly concerned about the semantics of  
10 the event. A declaration of emergency, while it would be done  
11 only to trigger certain responses in terms of aid from the  
12 Federal Government would not necessarily be perceived in that  
13 way by the public, and we were extremely sensitive to that.

14 We had a siren go off by mistake in the morning, for  
15 example, which caused all kinds of concern and there had been  
16 false reports of evacuation orders and the like so that we  
17 decided not to seek a declaration of emergency, based on the  
18 assurance that we would lose nothing in the way of logistical  
19 support or aid that would be forthcoming in the event the  
20 declaration were in.

21 MR. HARVEY: Thank you, Governor.

22 I have no further questions, Mr. Chairman.

23 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Governor Thornburgh, let me preface  
24 my first question by saying that university presidents very  
25 often have to make decisions on subjects that they know

1 absolutely nothing about. I know you find yourself in a  
2 totally unprecedented situation. I would like very much to  
3 know what kind of decision-making process did you go through  
4 in a situation where you had very confusing and bad informa-  
5 tion and where I believe you and your immediate aids were not  
6 experts at all on the subject?

7 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I think my training is as  
8 an engineer and as a lawyer, Mr. Chairman, and both of those  
9 callings I think promote a respect, a very high respect for  
10 the integrity of the facts with which you must deal, and  
11 from the very first notification that I received of an  
12 accident at the Three Mile Island site until we were able to  
13 report that at least the prospects for something catastrophic  
14 had passed, my instincts and those of my staff were to  
15 constantly probe, re-examine, cross examine sources of  
16 information so as to get the best approximation of the  
17 facts that were available.

18 I did a lot of that myself. My immediate staff,  
19 my Executive Assistant Jay Waldman and my Press Secretary  
20 Paul Critchlow, members of our administration charged with  
21 responsibilities in this area, Lieutenant-Governor William  
22 Scranton, my Secretary of Budget and Administration Robert  
23 Wilburn, all of them were constantly admonished by me to  
24 search out the facts of particular situations.

25 We would frequently review those facts and out of

1 that would come additional questions to be asked.

2 Perhaps the most difficult and frustrating aspect  
3 of this type of event, and what I would suggest would be the  
4 most important need to be met would be a diagnostic  
5 capability from the technical side and the ability to  
6 communicate that to those of us who were not well-versed  
7 in the technology of something as complex as a nuclear  
8 reactor.

9 Neither of those were present during the first  
10 48 hours following the event, and accordingly, we were left  
11 to our own devices to try to diagnose as best we could what  
12 the consequences of these indefinite events were, keeping  
13 in mind that our sole responsibility or prime responsibility  
14 was for the health and safety of the residents of the area  
15 and the integrity of the environment.

16 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Responding to the suggestion  
17 you have just made of your major problem, what kind of  
18 corrective action would you suggest if any governor is ever  
19 faced with such a situation again? Where would you like to  
20 see this diagnostic capability coming from and how should  
21 it be organized?

22 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I think the first improvement  
23 that I would like to see in the capability of all concerned  
24 to respond to an event like this, if it happens again, is  
25 within the utility itself at the site. One person after

1 another within the NRC characterized to me the so-called  
2 "thinness" of the technological capability of Metropolitan  
3 Edison at the Three Mile Island site.

4 That manifested itself to me in this inability to  
5 diagnose what precisely had gone wrong on the morning of  
6 March 28.

7 Accordingly, I think that while that tells us  
8 something about the utility, it also tells us something  
9 about the Nuclear Regulatory Commission's licensing standards,  
10 and I feel that it would be advantageous to not only upgrade  
11 the training of those people in charge of operating the  
12 reactor and ensure their capability of response in a crisis,  
13 but to require certain standards to be established for  
14 management people as well, so that there was an instantaneous  
15 recognition or capability for instantaneous recognition  
16 of the nature of the problem on the part of those people  
17 on site and those to whom they were responsible within the  
18 hierarchy of the utility.

19 Secondly, I think the response capability of the  
20 NRC itself, while I was very glad to see Harold Denton arrive  
21 on Friday, March 30, I would have been immensely more happy  
22 to see him there on Wednesday, March 28, and that interim  
23 of uncertainty about to whom we could look within the NRC  
24 for reliable information was a handicap as well. In other  
25 words, either through the facility of having a resident

1 inspector at the site or a much quicker response capability  
2 from Washington or Bethesda, the NRC's presence at the site  
3 of any kind of accident of this nature ought to be ensured  
4 in a much quicker time, and thirdly, obviously the very  
5 mechanics of communication ought to be improved at each of  
6 the sites of like facilities around the country.

7           The Signal Corps' response by Friday was excellent.  
8 Thereafter we had the kinds of communications we needed, but  
9 the communications capability from a technical point of view  
10 was not up to the standards that I would think would be  
11 necessary during the previous two days.

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1 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Governor, were you satisfied with  
2 the NRC as a source of information after Friday?

3 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes, I was. I was very  
4 pleased that Mr. Denton was there. The President assured me  
5 he was the best man available, and I have no reason to, in  
6 retrospect, dispute that characterization. He arrived in the  
7 afternoon of March 30 and reported to me within a couple of  
8 hours that he had established four separate study groups to  
9 carry out this diagnosis of the problem, and we developed a  
10 feeling of confidence about Mr. Denton and thereafter, I think,  
11 were able to work closely with him in not only being better  
12 apprised of the technological situation at the site but being  
13 able to rely upon him for the explanations to the public and  
14 to the press that were required to keep them informed as to  
15 matters that were clearly beyond my reach, and we were very  
16 grateful to have him there.

17 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: The reason I asked that last ques-  
18 tion is that we have had testimony at the previous public  
19 hearing that on Saturday and Sunday morning there was a major  
20 dispute within the ranks of the NRC representatives and,  
21 indeed, the NRC came very close to recommending to you a major  
22 evacuation based on what we now know to be totally false  
23 scientific analysis of the situation.

24 Were you exposed to that confusion, and if so, how  
25 did you respond to it?



1 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I didn't need expose to any  
2 more confusion, and I am grateful that I didn't know of what  
3 was going on.

4 I think Harold Denton said it about as well as anyone  
5 could when he left, finally, a grateful Pennsylvania, and while  
6 he is well able to speak for himself, I think, if I might quote  
7 to you what he said when he did leave, that it might be useful  
8 in that regard. It was to the effect, and I am quoting him:  
9 "I guess I've learned that emergencies can only be managed by  
10 people at the site; they can't be managed back at Washington."

11 I think there was an awful lot of managing that was  
12 going on out of Washington and Bethesda, certainly on Friday  
13 and Saturday, but I suspect previously and subsequent thereto  
14 as well, that I can't fault because the responsibility lay with  
15 those individuals, but I can't help but echo Mr. Denton's  
16 sentiments that that kind of management from afar is a poor  
17 substitute for bringing together the technological know-how  
18 with the factual assessment that can only be made at the site.

19 Mr. Denton, I am well aware, was -- now, and I did  
20 not know this at the time -- but concurred in the recommenda-  
21 tion, apparently, that was made to us on Friday morning by  
22 Mr. Collins that there be an evacuation, a recommendation which  
23 he very quickly, upon arriving at the site, acknowledged to  
24 have been in error and which, by now, I think the general con-  
25 sensus is was an erroneous recommendation.

American Geophysical Union

1           CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Perhaps what you have just said is  
2 the natural lead-in for my final question. You said that you  
3 cannot manage an emergency from Washington, quoting Mr.  
4 Denton. How about when you do not have an emergency situation?  
5 You must have given considerable thought since the accident  
6 to what the role of the state should be in general in nuclear  
7 power, in licensing, in inspection, or whatever way, and I  
8 would very much appreciate having your thoughts on what you  
9 feel the state role should be in nuclear power.

10           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Well, I think, clearly, that  
11 the people of my state at the present feel that there must be  
12 a much broader constituency consulted about the siting of  
13 nuclear facilities than has been the case in the past, and I  
14 must say I agree with that view. I think that hereafter, if  
15 there are to be additional reactor sites built in this nation,  
16 that the NRC or other appropriate agencies -- because this is  
17 a field where the federal government has preempted the field --  
18 is going to have to be extremely attentive to the concerns of  
19 state and local officials and the public at large about those  
20 decisions, and I think, with regard to our own situation, I  
21 have expressed and other residents of central Pennsylvania  
22 have expressed from time to time misgivings about proposed  
23 actions of the NRC with regard to reopening Unit 1 or cleaning  
24 up the contamination in Unit 2.

25           In short, it seems to me this is no longer a field

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1 which can be left to the experts from Washington from the  
2 Nuclear Regulatory Commission, and that all of us in government  
3 generally would be better advised to carry out a more deliberate  
4 process of seeking citizen input and, at the same time, recog-  
5 nizing that there is a real opportunity to educate people  
6 about the potential dangers of nuclear energy and what steps  
7 have been taken to obviate the recurrence of events such as  
8 this.

9           So I do think that with regard to siting, there is  
10 a need to expand the decisionmaking process to include states  
11 and perhaps local agencies as well.

12           Secondly, with regard to --

13           COMMISSIONER McPHERSON: Could I interrupt you there?  
14 Do you mean give the states a veto?

15           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I am not sure that that, at  
16 this time, is necessary, Commissioner. Clearly, now there is  
17 an opportunity for states to appear in a legal capacity before  
18 any licensing proceeding. Whether it is necessary to go to  
19 the other extreme and provide an absolute veto, I am not pre-  
20 pared to say at this moment. I think there must be some  
21 mechanism established to expand the number of persons who have  
22 input into the siting process, clearly.

23           Secondly, I think, with regard to inspection of these  
24 facilities, that the states, through their appropriate agencies,  
25 must have the right to visit, inspect, and examine the sites

1 from our point of view. That again is somewhat, I think, a  
 2 fail/safe or belt-and-suspenders type of operation, recognizing  
 3 that the NRC has responsibilities of inspection; nonetheless,  
 4 the states are closer in and more immediately concerned about  
 5 the facilities, and I think that it would be an incentive to  
 6 each of us as states to do what we have done in Pennsylvania,  
 7 and that is undertake, obviously in the aftermath of this  
 8 event, a beefing up of our own capability to monitor and  
 9 inspect these sites.

10 I think those two areas, one, the initial decision  
 11 with regard to siting, and secondly, the ongoing responsibility  
 12 or authority to inspect the sites, are areas that I would  
 13 recommend be given real consideration by the Commission.

14 The third one is an internal one of ours, as I men-  
 15 tioned, of developing our own capability to deal with these  
 16 events in terms of having monitoring equipment facilities,  
 17 trained personnel at the state level. I think most states are  
 18 probably like us, that in the absence of having had anything  
 19 to deal with like Three Mile Island, their cupboard was reason-  
 20 ably bare when it came to expertise to deal with this kind of  
 21 a situation.

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22 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Governor Peterson?

23 COMMISSIONER PETERSON: Governor Thornburgh, I would  
 24 like to ask some questions relative to the concept of safety  
 25 first. You pointed out that you would have been happier if

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1 Harold Denton had shown up on March 28 instead of March 30.  
2 The President dispatched Harold Denton as a reliable source of  
3 information, and as you pointed out a few minutes ago, Harold  
4 Denton was the senior official present in the meeting in Beth-  
5 esda at the time the recommendation was made to ask you people  
6 in Pennsylvania to evacuate the immediate area. As I under-  
7 stand it, he was the person who asked Mr. Collins to call  
8 Pennsylvania, and that your person, Colonel Henderson, in  
9 charge of emergency preparedness in Pennsylvania, recommended  
10 also that the area be evacuated, and yet the decision was made  
11 not to make that recommendation.

12 In hindsight, with many days to think about it,  
13 Harold Denton and others say that that recommendation was not  
14 sound, and from what we learned here, the scientific basis for  
15 it did not exist. But you can't wait for that kind of analysis  
16 in time of emergency. Obviously, you have to act promptly if  
17 a real tragedy is in the making.

18 So wouldn't it have been appropriate, as a safety  
19 first measure, to evacuate when there was any uncertainty of  
20 a tragedy occurring? And my question is, what were you trying  
21 to protect the people from by not ordering an evacuation?

22 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I think that is a very fair  
23 question, and I think the best way I can answer it is to  
24 examine the events of Friday morning and a continuum of events  
25 that began when I was first notified of this accident at

1 7:50 a. m. on Wednesday, March 28.

2 The thought of evacuation crossed my mind immediately  
3 at that time, and it was never out of my mind for the next 10  
4 days, because that was the obvious most compelling response to  
5 a radiation expansion throughout the area.

6 There are known risks, I was told, in an evacuation.  
7 The movement of elderly persons, people in intensive care units,  
8 babies in incubators, the simple traffic on the highway that  
9 results from even the best of an orderly evacuation, are going  
10 to exert a toll in lives and in injuries.

11 Moreover, this type of evacuation had never been  
12 carried out before on the face of this earth, and it is an  
13 evacuation that was quite different in kind and quality than  
14 one undertaken in time of flood or hurricane or tornado or  
15 what have you -- you can always look out and say, Well, the  
16 river is rising; it's coming up to 10 feet, and when it gets  
17 to 20 feet, we will have to move these folks and those folks.

18 When you talk about evacuating people within a five  
19 mile radius of the site of a nuclear reactor, you must recog-  
20 nize that that will have ten-mile consequences, 20-mile conse-  
21 quences, hundred-mile consequences, as we heard during the  
22 course of this event. That is to say, it is an event that  
23 people are not able to see, to hear, to taste, to smell. They  
24 cannot say that the radiation cloud is now five miles out from  
25 the facility because it cannot be that carefully established,

1 and differing in that way from any kind of natural disaster  
2 that we have had to deal with in the past in our experience.

3 All of that, it seems to me, militates in favor of  
4 being sure that there is in fact a need for evacuation before  
5 evacuation is undertaken. It would have been very easy, and  
6 perhaps prudent -- "safety first," in your terminology -- for  
7 us to order an evacuation immediately at 7:50 a. m. on Wednes-  
8 day, March 28. In retrospect, that would have been unnecessary.  
9 It might have taken the toll that I outlined in terms of lives  
10 and injury, but it would have been defensible at the time.

11 The reason why we did not undertake immediately an  
12 evacuation on the recommendation of a Mr. Harold Collins, whom,  
13 to this day, I have never met, was in furtherance of the type  
14 of process that I described we went through constantly in this  
15 crisis. That is to test our facts.

16 I had never heard of Mr. Collins. I didn't know who  
17 he was, what his position was within the NRC, and it seemed to  
18 me prudent to spend a half an hour trying to verify who he was  
19 and whether or not he was authorized to make the recommendation  
20 and whether his recommendation had any basis in fact.

21 Ultimately, when I did reach his boss, the Chairman  
22 of the Commission, it turned out that the recommendation was  
23 not one that had the approval of the Commission, or at least  
24 it was so expressed to me.

25 One thing I think it is important to note, I did not

1 ask nor receive from Colonel Henderson a recommendation to  
2 evacuate independent of the recommendation made by Mr. Collins.  
3 I called Mr. Henderson, Colonel Henderson, to verify who Mr.  
4 Collins was and whether he was in a position to make this  
5 recommendation, and Colonel Henderson repeated that he, too,  
6 had had the recommendation passed on to him from the site,  
7 from the Met. Ed. people and from the offices of Mr. Collins.

8 But I think that process served us well in avoiding  
9 the need for an evacuation with respect to which there were  
10 known and unknown risks, and I am satisfied that a little care  
11 taken in examining the source of facts and in determining the  
12 authority of the individuals who are making these recommenda-  
13 tions so that they can be checked out and verified against  
14 other sources of that type of recommendation which I relied on  
15 was worthwhile.

16 COMMISSIONER PETERSON: Governor, I was wondering  
17 if, today, you would recommend to other governors around the  
18 country that if a somewhat similar incident occurred at a  
19 plant in their state and they got recommendations from the  
20 plant site and from the Nuclear Regulatory Commission and from  
21 the head of their emergency preparedness, that they shouldn't  
22 immediately order evacuation.

23 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I think I would recommend that  
24 if the steps that I have recommended here this morning had been  
25 taken. That is to say that there has been identified a person



1 upon whom I can rely, to whom I am to look. Frankly, Governor,  
2 if Harold Denton and not Harold Collins had given me that recom-  
3 mendation and it had come on Friday afternoon and not Friday  
4 morning, it would have taken me much less time to verify and  
5 act accordingly.

6 But if I were to have gotten a call from some --  
7 suppose, as happens during these types of events, a hoax were  
8 carried out. An individual calls me and says, This is such  
9 and such from the NRC; you've got to evacuate within 10 miles.  
10 I think it would be absolutely insane for me to act on that  
11 kind of recommendation.

12 In effect, that is somewhat like the recommendation  
13 I got on Friday morning, because I knew -- never heard of  
14 Harold Collins. I didn't know whether he worked for the NRC,  
15 and I think spending half an hour being prudent and finding  
16 out who he was and whether his recommendation was in order was  
17 a good investment of time.

18 COMMISSIONER PETERSON: I respect that very much. I  
19 think it was certainly in order to find out who Harold Collins  
20 was. But in hindsight again, we now know that Harold Collins  
21 was calling as a result of a decision of a meeting where the  
22 leading person there was Harold Denton and key people involved  
23 with licensing and regulations, Victor Stello and Roger Mattson,  
24 Paul Collins, were all there in that meeting when the decision  
25 was made to ask Mr. Collins to call Pennsylvania to recommend

1 an evacuation; in fact, people who, in my judgment, were much  
2 more qualified to make that recommendation than the Chairman  
3 of the Commission.

4 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: They were all there and they  
5 were all wrong.

6 COMMISSIONER PETERSON: Yes, in hindsight, yes.

7 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Professor Taylor?

8 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: I would like to explore what  
9 kind of information, from what sources, would have triggered  
10 a response from you to evacuate. Now, let me put that in con-  
11 text. As I understand it, you were concerned about two differ-  
12 ent situations: first of all, what had actually been released,  
13 what people were being exposed to, what the hazard of that was,  
14 and second, what might happen if something worse developed  
15 that had to do with the power plant.

16 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes.

17 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: So my first question is,  
18 between these two causes for concern, which concerned you the  
19 most, what had actually been released or what might be released?

20 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't know that I ever made  
21 that kind of differentiation. As I said, my concern of the  
22 technical people was what is the worst thing that can happen,  
23 based on the facts as you know them now, and how much time  
24 would we have to respond in the event that did happen?

25 We had -- the menu kept growing of concerns, sometimes

1 with bogus additions of things that, as it turned out, really  
2 were not of tremendous concern. I am not a technical person.  
3 I never attempted to masquerade as someone who could make the  
4 kinds of technical judgments, but I did know enough to deter-  
5 mine that if there was going to be an explosion or a meltdown,  
6 that we had better be concerned about moving some people, and  
7 consequently, our concern about these types of catastrophic  
8 events was raised almost hourly as conditions changed and the  
9 ability to diagnose the status of the site improved.

10 With regard to the cumulative potential doses of  
11 radiation, the same kinds of concerns were expressed there.  
12 The decision to recommend to pregnant women and preschool  
13 children that they leave the area on Friday, March 30, was  
14 based on advice given to me by health experts after learning  
15 of the potential for cumulative doses that would particularly  
16 impact on this category of persons, that it was no longer safe  
17 for them to remain there.

18 But it is rather hard to look and say, well, what  
19 would have made you do something, because the variety of things  
20 that could have happened is almost infinite.

21 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Yes. Now, I would like to get  
22 some idea of the extent to which you had in mind or people  
23 that you had confidence in on your staff or in NRC, including  
24 Harold Denton, to what extent was there any discussion of a  
25 level of radioactive radiation intensities at which you would

1 sort of automatically decide to evacuate. Was there discussion  
2 of what, under what conditions of direct measurement of radia-  
3 tion levels you would then decide to evacuate?

4 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: There was considerable discus-  
5 sion by Dr. Gordon MacLeod, our Secretary of Health, in con-  
6 jection with Dr. Neal Wald of the University of Pittsburgh,  
7 officials of the Department of Health, Education and Welfare,  
8 including the Food and Drug Administration, and others who  
9 were not medical doctors but were in a position to assess the  
10 level of radiation that might be foreseeable from the event  
11 from time to time.

12 I am not, frankly, well versed enough in the techno-  
13 logy to give you the facts and figures. My question to them  
14 was, what do you recommend? Should we be moving people? What  
15 kinds of advisories should be forthcoming from me as the chief  
16 executive of the state, based upon your expertise? And that  
17 process ensued from the very beginning of our efforts to assess  
18 precisely what had happened and what the consequences were.  
19 And as I mentioned, the only tangible or specific action taken  
20 was the recommendation with regard to pregnant women and pre-  
21 school children.

22 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Well, Wednesday afternoon,  
23 suppose that there had been -- suppose the radioactive releases  
24 had been much higher than they actually were. I am interested  
25 in knowing whom you would have looked to, what individual, to

1 tell you what had happened and what the meaning of it was and  
2 under what -- who would you have trusted to form the basis for  
3 your own decision to evacuate? Would that have been -- let me  
4 ask it this way: Suppose that one of the officials of the  
5 utility had told you this, that the radiation levels were now  
6 dangerous. Would that have been sufficient to pretty auto-  
7 matically suggest the decision to evacuate?

8 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Well, I am afraid I would have  
9 to put that utility official in the Harold Collins test cate-  
10 gory. It depends on who it was, what his background was,  
11 whether he was a person who could assess the need to undertake  
12 an evacuation. I would take the time, frankly, to verify that  
13 recommendation with appropriate health officials, whoever was  
14 available.

15 One of the first things that I told the Lieutenant  
16 Governor when I talked to him Wednesday morning was to marshal  
17 whatever we could in the way of all governmental resources and  
18 all private sector resources to enable us to make decisions  
19 about things that we simply were not equipped, by way of  
20 background, to assess the facts on. I am not a medical doctor  
21 or a nuclear engineer or any one of a number of other expertises  
22 that ought to be brought to bear on this kind of thing.

23 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Now, in connection with the  
24 other possible reason to evacuate -- that is, because of the  
25 possibility of a much bigger release than had actually happened

1 -- was there any discussion in your office about the statement  
2 of the probability of a big release that would then cause you  
3 to order an evacuation? In other words, was there any discus-  
4 sion of whether, if Harold Denton, for example, had said, Look,  
5 there is a 10 percent chance --

6 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes.

7 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: -- or a one percent chance or  
8 a 50-50 chance -- was there discussion of that number and for  
9 what value of that "guesstimate" you would then decide that it  
10 would be a correct decision to evacuate?

11 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Again, I would not be in a  
12 position to give you the specifics of that type of discussion  
13 as far as the numbers go because I am simply not technologically  
14 equipped to do it. But obviously, our concern after the sizable  
15 release of Friday morning was whether or not there was a chance  
16 of that repeating, of our having to deal with another release  
17 of that size during the day or thereafter, and that was a sub-  
18 ject of intense concern on Friday and through the day until  
19 Mr. Denton arrived and was able to give us his assessment of  
20 what was acutally occurring on site.

21 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Well, let me put it this way.  
22 Suppose that now, or at some time in the future, it was deter-  
23 mined, with hindsight, that Wednesday, or Thursday, or Friday,  
24 or later, when the hydrogen bubble was identified, that the  
25 best technical assessment of the situation on the basis of

1 everything now known or known in the next several months,  
2 would say there is a 50 percent chance of a major release of  
3 radioactive material that would have killed people if they had  
4 not been evacuated -- suppose it developed that that was in  
5 fact the case then, but not known to anybody then. Would you  
6 then say that the decision not to evacuate was a correct  
7 decision?

8 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I would count myself and the  
9 people of central Pennsylvania ill served by not knowing that.  
10 But if you are going to go through a whole list of "what if's"  
11 and "supposes," I am just unable to cope with that.

12 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: No, I understand. But what I  
13 am trying to get a sense of, you were very concerned about the  
14 ambiguity of information you were getting, and so on.

15 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes.

16 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: I don't know -- I don't believe  
17 anyone knows that I have been able to identify -- what all of  
18 the analysis of what happened would yield in terms of a state-  
19 ment now about the likelihood of a core melt of sufficient  
20 magnitude to cause a release from containment. There are  
21 still some open questions about the effects of a hydrogen  
22 explosion of the kind that we know did take place, or at least  
23 a hydrogen burn.

24 Suppose it should develop -- and this is, at least  
25 in my mind, a real possibility -- that things were in a much

1 more dangerous state than was recognized then. Suppose,  
2 further, that we had a really good system of information  
3 gathering and analysis in the utility as well as a sort of  
4 checking authority in NRC so that the real experts in whom  
5 you would have confidence, whom you knew or felt confidence in  
6 through investigations by your staff. Suppose that they all  
7 said, Look, this is the situation. There has been a great deal  
8 of fuel damage. It is still going on, let's say Wednesday  
9 afternoon, which is apparently a possibility, and so you were  
10 now flooded with accurate information which we identify now  
11 or during the next several months, but you didn't have that.

12 In other words, suppose that what I guess you were  
13 recommending --

14 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Well, if you are asking me if  
15 I would have ordered a --

16 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: -- had now really existed, then  
17 is there any possibility that under those conditions, the net  
18 result would have been that you would have ordered an evacua-  
19 tion and it would have turned out, for reasons having to do,  
20 perhaps, with luck, to have been unnecessary.

21 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't think there would be  
22 a possibility I would order an evacuation; there would be a  
23 certainty I would order an evacuation under the conditions you  
24 pose; that is, having reliable information from people whose  
25 authority and expertise were established. I think it would be



1 a default on my responsibilities to act.

2           There was no reluctance on my part to act on the  
3 basis of information in which I had confidence; witness the  
4 recommendation to the pregnant women and preschool children,  
5 that once we were satisfied that there was a possibility of a  
6 recurrence of the Friday morning event sufficient to express  
7 concern for that particularly susceptible group of the populace,  
8 we recommended that they move.

9           But I think that, in a way, caution can be reckless  
10 abandon. As I mentioned, if you were to act immediately at  
11 7:50 on Wednesday, March 28, to move everybody out within a  
12 five, ten, 20, 50 mile area, against the possibility, however  
13 dim, that some catastrophe might ensue, we would be facing  
14 that every single day, and the process, particularly with the  
15 safeguards that I have recommended and strongly urge upon you  
16 today for the fact-gathering, diagnostic, and communications  
17 process, I think will greatly enhance the ability to make those  
18 decisions in a far better way than we did.

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Tape 3

1 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Just one final question about  
2 the conditions under which you would have felt comfortable with  
3 your sources of information. You have indicated that as soon  
4 as Harold Denton had been there for some time that you felt  
5 much better about your knowledge of what was actually going  
6 on there.

7 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I figured if the President of  
8 the United States recommended him, he must be pretty good.

9 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Well, that is the question I  
10 would like to raise. You presumably had never heard of Harold  
11 Denton before --

12 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I had heard of Jimmy Carter,  
13 though.

14 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Pardon me.

15 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes. You had heard of Jimmy  
16 Carter; however, I presume that you have been in situations  
17 in which people whom you have a high confidence have recommen-  
18 ded people who have turned out not to know what they were doing.

19 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes.

20 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: What I am getting at is this.  
21 I am not trying to say anything about Harold Denton's capabil-  
22 ities, but I am interested in knowing whether you would advise  
23 really that there be one person nominated by the President of  
24 the United States as the sole source of information or would  
25 you rather, for example, have the situation in which there

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1 were very knowledgeable people at the operator level and the  
2 management level at the utility who are also giving you inform-  
3 ation, which might or might not contradict information that  
4 you had gotten from someone nominated specifically by the Pres-  
5 ident.

6 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: In all seriousness, I think  
7 the dispatch of Mr. Denton in the context within which my re-  
8 quest was made and the well known frustration of all of us  
9 about the inability to develop reliable information gave me more  
10 confidence in him than I would have if he had been dispatched  
11 out of the blue. I think that is important.

12 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Because on a relative scale,  
13 among other things, relative to the situation that you had be-  
14 fore --

15 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Absolutely. Because the  
16 President knew of my concerns and Chairman Henry knew of my  
17 concerns and Chairman Henry knew the people within his organi-  
18 zation who could do the job. But you refer to in your quest-  
19 ion is precisely what I would recommend and have recommended  
20 to you this morning, lest I be mistaken, that the degree of  
21 capability be enhanced at every level. At the operating level,  
22 at the management level within the utility, within the NRC to  
23 have a group of trouble shooters, if you like, who are avail-  
24 able, ala Harold Denton, to come to a site immediately and  
25 establish an authoritative lens through which we can view this

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1 situation rather than being beset from all sides by conflict-  
2 ing stories -- cutting down the conflict.

3 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Now, if that happened, would  
4 you then use your staff to some extent the same way that you  
5 did at Three Mile Island; that is, to pool these different  
6 sources and not just act on what you were told by one person?

7 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Absolutely.

8 COMMISSIONER TAYLOR: Thank you very much.

9 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: There are five commissioners  
10 waiting to question. Dr. Marks was first.

11 COMMISSIONER MARKS: Governor Thornburgh, I would  
12 like to turn for a minute to the issues of safety and preven-  
13 tion during what might be called normal operations of the nu-  
14 clear reactor plants. You do have that situation in the State  
15 of Pennsylvania and also in the context of the fact that an  
16 apparatus that is in existence, presumably oriented toward  
17 issues of health and safety of both the workers and the public,  
18 can better deal with this emergency situation. And I wonder  
19 whether you could tell us what you have been able to do with re-  
20 spect to the issues of ongoing monitoring of public health and  
21 safety issues and, if appropriate, worker health and safety  
22 issues in the nuclear plants in the State of Pennsylvania since  
23 the accident.

24 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Most of the review process and  
25 assessment of the aftermath of the Three Mile Island accident

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DO4 1 has been carried out by a commission appointed by me and head-  
2 ed by the Lieutenant Governor, containing within its membership  
3 appropriate cabinet level members and other experts from the  
4 private sector and from the governmental sector, with just  
5 that charge. I think there has been a lot of comment about  
6 proliferation of commissions and examining bodies, but in this  
7 instance ours is directed at two kinds of efforts. One, the  
8 kind of in-house review that clearly is necessary in dealing  
9 with response to an unprecedented event and, secondly, an  
10 assessment of the economic, health, environmental, psychologi-  
11 cal, what have you consequences of the event. That group is  
12 at its task presently and I think it would be somewhat prema-  
13 ture for me to anticipate what they may well recommend. But  
14 their responsibility and their charge is to accomplish precise-  
15 ly what you suggested.

16 COMMISSIONER MARKS: Well, we heard testimony from  
17 Dr. MacLeod, for example, that the Department of Health has  
18 still no capability of dealing with issues related to radia-  
19 tion hazards, radiological safety, with respect to nuclear  
20 plant operations in the state. And, I guess specifically, I  
21 wonder if you have been able to formulate any sense or priori-  
22 ties with regard to state commitments to this effort.

23 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: The process for establishing  
24 those priorities and making recommendations is the commission  
25 which the Lieutenant Governor chairs and I will look with

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1 anticipation to what they recommend. Dr. MacLeod is a member  
2 of the commission. He has stated quite forcefully his views  
3 with respect to the condition of the department he found when  
4 he took it over earlier this year. There are shortcomings.  
5 There are shortcomings, I will warrant, in almost every aspect  
6 of our ability to respond to this kind of an event. But our  
7 feeling is that we can address those within the context of the  
8 findings of this commission with regard to what happened and  
9 within the confines of what the Scranton committee is looking  
10 at within looking at what our response was, where the inade-  
11 quacies were and where we can shore it up.

12 COMMISSIONER MARKS: Do you have any sense of a de-  
13 ficiency with regard to information transfer to health profes-  
14 sionals or the public residing in the area of Three Mile Island  
15 right now. The consequences of the accident are obviously  
16 still with us. The clean up is still going on. In this re-  
17 gard we heard testimony again that the Department of Health  
18 has no capability of providing any, if you will, support ser-  
19 vices for the ongoing events.

20 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: If that was Dr. MacLeod's  
21 testimony, I am in no position to contradict it. I think his  
22 judgment on those matters will be incorporated into whatever  
23 changes are made within the Department of Health to be more  
24 responsive in this regard.

25 COMMISSIONER MARKS: Have you had any requests coming

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1 to you at this juncture for either budgets or personnel to  
2 deal with health and safety issues surrounding Three Mile Is-  
3 land right now?

4 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Not specifically. I think we  
5 have been discussing with Dr. MacLeod his recommendations in  
6 many respects for reorganization of a health department, that  
7 leaves much to be desired. And I will look to him for guid-  
8 ance in that respect. Specifically, at the moment, I think  
9 that what we want to weigh is the complete assessment, the re-  
10 sponse capability within state government from Governor Scrant-  
11 ton's group.

12 COMMISSIONER MARKS: This, in your view, includes  
13 not only a response to emergency, but ongoing surveillance of  
14 the issues related to public health and safety for those re-  
15 actors that will be operating in the state?

16 GOVERNOR THORNBURG: That was part of the specific  
17 charge given to the Scranton Commission when it was established.

18 COMMISSIONER MARKS: Thank you, Governor.

19 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Professor Lewis.

20 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: Governor, I would like to just  
21 go back to a statement that you made about a call that you  
22 had from the President on Friday, in which he said that your  
23 decision for no massive evacuation was correct. What support-  
24 ing evidence did the President indicate that he had on Friday  
25 morning that that decision was correct?

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1 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't know. He did not in-  
2 dicate to me -- it was obvious that he had talked with Chair-  
3 man Henry, but I did not cross examine him.

4 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: The reason I am asking that is  
5 I am curious. This was just shortly after Harold Collins and  
6 a group that included Denton and Mattson and so forth was say-  
7 ing that there was a danger there at Three Mile Island. How  
8 do you account for the discrepancy between that soothing phrase  
9 from the White House and what you were getting from NRC in  
10 Washington?

11 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I wasn't getting it from NRC.  
12 I had no idea that Messrs. Denton, Mattson, whomever, were  
13 recommending evacuation. I didn't find that out until well  
14 after the event when the transcripts were first made public.

15 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: I see.

16 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: All I knew was that someone  
17 whom I had never heard of, named Harold Collins, was recommen-  
18 ding an evacuation. Within half an hour, I was able to verify  
19 that that wasn't really expressing the view of the chairman of  
20 the commission and accordingly I discarded it. There was no  
21 controversy or discrepancy, to my mind.

22 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: Okay. You had heard from  
23 Harold Collins that there was a danger and an evacuation.  
24 should be --

25 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I never talked to Mr. Collins.

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1           COMMISSIONER LEWIS: You had gotten that information  
2 from Mr. Collins. Then you had a call from the White House  
3 saying the decision not to evacuate was correct. I am just  
4 trying to find out what was the thinking. Were there, in your  
5 view, considerations about the future of nuclear power and  
6 what this whole thing might do to the industry at that point?

7           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I had only one consideration in  
8 my mind; the health and the safety of the people of central  
9 Pennsylvania. It was a very tense time and there was very  
10 little time to think about the future of nuclear power at that  
11 time.

12           COMMISSIONER LEWIS: Well, with all due respect to  
13 the President, he has been trained in nuclear power in Navy  
14 submarines, but he is not an expert himself and I am, again,  
15 trying to evaluate your decision to follow his advice in terms  
16 of not pursuing the evacuation.

17           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: He didn't give me any advice.  
18 I didn't ask him for any advice. He knew the decision that we  
19 had made and he expressed general agreement. This was not an  
20 extended colloquy. It was really a very quick conversation  
21 because things were happening rather thick and fast.

22           COMMISSIONER LEWIS: Did you have any discussions  
23 with him or anyone else from the White House about the possible  
24 political fallout from this incident in terms of the future  
25 of nuclear power?

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1 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: No.

2 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: So, that never came up as a  
3 consideration in not ordering an evacuation?

4 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Absolutely not.

5 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: I want to ask you some other  
6 questions if I might. Could you assess the impact of the  
7 Three Mile Island coverage, that is the news coverage, on your  
8 ability to manage the event?

9 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: There were two events that I  
10 could single out as making our task more difficult. But I  
11 think, by and large, the reporting under the circumstances was  
12 responsible. When I say "under the circumstances", I mean  
13 that news reporters, even experienced news reporters were hav-  
14 ing the same kinds of difficulties that I and my staff were  
15 having in trying to pin down the facts. In fact, I, from time  
16 to time, expressed great sympathy with them in that regard  
17 because we were in effect doing the same job, trying to corre-  
18 late sources. The two events that were somewhat troublesome  
19 was, first of all, a report on Friday afternoon, relating to  
20 a supposed imminence of a meltdown and a report on Saturday  
21 evening relating to the supposed incidence of an explosion.  
22 Both of those reports were distorted at best and caused a good  
23 deal of concern, not only among my staff and others at the  
24 site and among the general populace, but among considerable  
25 numbers of news persons who were there as well and who

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1 perceived the reports to be somewhat inaccurate. But I would  
2 say, by and large, that the reporting job done was a responsi-  
3 ble one, with the exception of those two events.

4 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: Governor, were you aware that  
5 both of those reports came from NRC sources?

6 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I later learned that, yes.

7 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: So, they had been cross checked  
8 and the reporters were only indicating the confusion within  
9 the NRC.

10 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I would only paraphrase Mr.  
11 Denton and say that, perhaps, the management of the news from  
12 Washington or Bethesda is not really appropriate either in an  
13 incident like this and that is why we tried to -- over some  
14 objection from the news media -- to establish one voice on  
15 technological matters, i.e. Mr. Denton, one voice on the emer-  
16 gency response matters, myself. And I think that worked fair-  
17 ly well, although it was frustrating because it cut off a lot  
18 of sources.

19 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: It was frustrating to the media,  
20 too.

21 Governor, in terms of, again, managing the event,  
22 do you think it is okay for the people to be aware of the  
23 confusion that exists? In fact, the media were reflecting the  
24 confusion that was in existence. Do you think that is useful  
25 or important that the public know that the experts are

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1 disagreeing?

2 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: That is one of the toughest

3 questions to wrestle in retrospect that I have found. I think

4 it is important to apprise the public in an event like this,

5 which is so unprecedented of every bit of factual material

6 that there is. To cover up any of the consequences for what-

7 ever reason or any of the conditions for whatever reason is

8 really not serving the public well. But part of the facts --

9 well, let me just say -- it was a fact that during this inter-

10 val that we didn't know the facts and that we had five or six

11 different versions of a particular event and obviously, there

12 is a real danger of eroding the confidence of the public in

13 the sources of their information if that kind of scenario is

14 played out in full. We worked very hard to try to make the

15 Governor's office an island of credibility in this event. I

16 don't know that we fully succeeded. But we resisted the temp-

17 tation to speak to the press and through the press to the pub-

18 lic until we had some reasonable fix on the facts and didn't

19 hesitate to come back and say we were wrong, the information

20 we got was wrong. We did that several times. In fact, we got

21 a little bit tired of it. But it is an extremely difficult

22 judgment to make and I don't know what the answer to your

23 question is. I hope you can give us some guidance on that

24 with regard to proper dissemination of information policy.

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25 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: Well, Governor, in light of the

1 Three Mile Island experience and what it did to public credi-  
2 bility, what has it done to the public perception of those  
3 who run the nuclear power industry, including the NRC, utili-  
4 ties, etcetera? Is there any way, ever, to recover the belief  
5 of the citizens that they will get the straight answers or even  
6 that these people know the straight answers.

7 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't know what it has done,  
8 because you have to use some fairly sophisticated polling tech-  
9 niques to really get a picture of what the public thinks. But  
10 I do think that the future of the nuclear industry, to some  
11 extent, does depend upon two things, one of which is the imple-  
12 mentation of the types of changes that I have recommended here  
13 and Governor Babbitt knows through the National Governors Asso-  
14 ciation, which are designed to create a process for the report-  
15 ing of facts and the diagnosis of difficulties at these reac-  
16 tors which enhances the public's confidence in that process.

17 And the second is the far more difficult and intan-  
18 gible process of earning back the trust and the confidence of  
19 the public on the part of the utilities, Nuclear Regulatory  
20 Commission, the Governor of Pennsylvania, all of us who had  
21 responsibilities which were difficult to meet. I don't know  
22 I can't assess where that stands at the present time. But I  
23 think that is key from the industry's point of view, which  
24 you were asking me about, really, from their point of view to  
25 earn back some degree of confidence before any new initiatives

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1 are undertaken in nuclear power development.

2 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: All right, Governor. Just one  
3 more line of questioning if I might.

4 You said earlier that you would not favor a state  
5 veto over the decision by the NRC to site any new plants with-  
6 in your state. How do you feel about a local plebiscite, allow-  
7 ing the people in an area to decide for themselves, whether or  
8 not they do want that nuclear plant in their territory?

9 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I think it would be useful,  
10 perhaps, as part of a process designed to decide these quest-  
11 ions. I am not convinced at this time that either the veto  
12 power or a plebiscite veto power is the best answer.

13 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: Can you tell me why you feel  
14 that way? It is interesting to hear a state governor willing  
15 to relinquish a certain amount of control over his territory  
16 and I would like to know your thinking on this.

17 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: It is few and far between, I  
18 assure you. I don't know. I am somewhat suspicious of the  
19 race to referenda on every single question that comes down the  
20 pike. We are a representative government. We elect people in  
21 our legislatures and in our executive and judicial branches to  
22 carry out decisions. We expand and contract as the demands  
23 increase or decrease those areas where we utilize a direct re-  
24 ferendum, in some states more than others. States, still I  
25 like to think of as laboratories of democracy, in Justice

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1 Brandeis' term. I am just not sure that a blanket rule laying  
 2 down a plebiscite requirement or giving the veto power to  
 3 governors is advisable. It is tempting, believe me, but I am  
 4 really not confident enough myself that that is the real answer.  
 5 I think there are processes that can be developed that allow  
 6 a maximum input from all concerned parties. Somebody has to  
 7 make the decision.

8 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: From a citizen's point of view,  
 9 the NRC is not elected. It is not as though you have the final  
 10 decision made by your elected leaders. So, it is a different  
 11 setup where it is being decided by a group in Washington that  
 12 is appointed and has long terms. I am interested to ask you  
 13 that because it seems your Lieutenant Governor told us that he  
 14 really wouldn't mind a plebiscite. I don't know whether that  
 15 reflects a division of opinion or that I might have caught him  
 16 more in surprise.

17 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: No. He is free to and ably  
 18 expresses his own views. I don't know. I would challenge  
 19 your own imagination in terms of a recommendation. I don't  
 20 know whether there is a place for the Congress, a joint commit-  
 21 tee, for example. There are any number of ways, but I am the  
 22 last one to urge on the basis of giving it not all that much  
 23 thought. But I will be glad to and if I have any further  
 24 thoughts, maybe I can submit them.

25 COMMISSIONER LEWIS: Thank you.

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CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Commissioner McBride.

COMMISSIONER MC BRIDE: Mr. Chairman, the question I was going to ask, I believe, has been fairly well addressed by Governor Thornburgh, not directly and so, perhaps, it might be well to pin it down.

I gather from your responses, Governor, that in the event the likelihood for continued reliance on nuclear generating facilities is a realistic appraisal of our future needs and the question of locating such facilities arises with respect to Pennsylvania, that you are not hostile to the idea but that you would want to look at it in the light of the additional technical training and the implementation of certain recommendations that might be made as a result of this experience. That is my general impression. But I would appreciate it if you would give us the benefit of your thinking with that respect.

GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Well, I think both with respect to those sites currently being operated in Pennsylvania, those that are under construction and any new construction that would be planned -- although I find that unlikely in the foreseeable future -- that the types of recommendations that I made this morning from the point of view of emergency response, I would regard as almost an absolute necessity. In fact, I think we would be extremely disturbed if that kind of result doesn't come out of this commission's findings and the response

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1 to those findings per the order of the President and the NRC.

2 With regard to the future, I think we will have a

3 lot to say about the planning of sites within Pennsylvania.

4 The people of Pennsylvania have made clear that they share my

5 view; my level of skepticism about the future of nuclear power

6 has been raised substantially by this event. Those who urge

7 increased reliance on nuclear power have a much greater burden

8 of proof to meet now than they did before March 28. On the

9 other hand, I think it is equally inadmissable to call for the

10 immediate shutdown of those sites which are operating in Penn-

11 sylvania, to enact a statewide or nationwide moratorium on the

12 basis of information available now. Although, I would not

13 rule out such a proposition depending on what the findings of

14 this commission are.

15 The point is that I think that all of us have had

16 our sensitivity about the future of nuclear power raised sub-

17 stantially by this kind of event, and I think those of us who

18 are governors or local officials and citizen's groups are not

19 going to be bashful about raising concerns in the public arena

20 as it should be as this process unfolds.

21 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Commissioner McPherson.

22 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: Governor Thornburgh, some

23 of these questions have also been asked, but I want to fill in

24 the interstices if I may. I want to address them not to

25 Friday, but to your decisions on Wednesday, on the first day.

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1 Were you aware on Wednesday afternoon that there was consider-  
2 able likelihood that there had been core damage?

3 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: The first full briefing that  
4 I had on the matter of the status of the facility was on  
5 Wednesday evening at my home. Although I had gotten reports  
6 throughout the day from the Lieutenant Governor and from mem-  
7 bers of my staff as they sought to put together some kind of  
8 picture of precisely what the status of the facility, the  
9 evening meeting at 11 o'clock was the first sit down that we  
10 had of all persons concerned. And at that meeting members of  
11 the staff of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission Regional Office  
12 and of our Department of Environmental Resources gave me as  
13 best they could some description of what had transpired during  
14 the early morning hours and some prognosis of what we could  
15 expect thereafter. At that meeting the problem -- I remember  
16 this particularly -- the problem of core damage was not dis-  
17 cussed and I remembered it because after everyone had left and  
18 I was preparing to get some sleep, my memory went back, as all  
19 of us layman do, to the only book that I had ever read about  
20 nuclear facilities and possible difficulties, a book called  
21 "We Almost Lost Detroit", which I had read a couple of years  
22 ago. And a little knowledge -- I don't know whether it is a  
23 dangerous thing or not, but it is all I had. And I remembered  
24 the description of what -- the consequences of the core becoming  
25 uncovered and the so-called "China Syndrome" and meltdown and

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1 I was puzzled that that had not been raised at the meeting  
 2 that we had had previously. In retrospect, it appears that it  
 3 simply had not been raised because of an oversight. It had  
 4 been discussed earlier with others during the day, but on  
 5 Thursday morning, I immediately raised with the Lieutenant  
 6 Governor and with Paul Kritschlow, my press secretary, who  
 7 was in contact with the NRC people, why this hadn't been dis-  
 8 cussed. Was there core damage? Was there something that we  
 9 had not touched on in the briefing in the previous evening  
 10 that we should be concerned about.

11           During the day on Thursday, I guess my message got  
 12 through we discussed in some greater detail in the afternoon  
 13 the fact that there was fuel damage and, thereafter, it was a  
 14 very great concern of ours throughout the period of time. But  
 15 I do remember the fact that I was perplexed a little bit by  
 16 the fact that the briefing that we had gotten had failed to  
 17 touch on that particular item.

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GREENWOOD

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1                   COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: I know this is a hard  
 2 question to answer, but about noon on Wednesday, do you have  
 3 any recollection of what your understanding of the physical  
 4 situation at the plant was at that time, at Wednesday noon?

5                   GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: About noon on Wednesday  
 6 I had just finished discussing with the Lieutenant-Governor  
 7 his press conference which had been held at about 11 o'clock,  
 8 and we were meeting in my office with the Lieutenant-Governor,  
 9 with William Dornsife, our nuclear engineer from the  
 10 Department of Environmental Resources and others, and  
 11 continuing this constant process of rolling over what we  
 12 had in the way of facts and what we did not have in the  
 13 way of facts and how we were going to close that gap.

14                   At that time unbeknownst to me, of course, there  
 15 was a release of radiation taking place from the facility  
 16 under the supervision of the utility which we did not have  
 17 prior notice of, but I did not learn about that until later  
 18 on when the Lieutenant-Governor had a second press conference  
 19 to bring that undisclosed release to the attention of the  
 20 public and the press.

21                   COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: What I am getting at with  
 22 respect to both what you knew on Wednesday on the core  
 23 damage is this, to ask you on whom you relied to translate  
 24 what you knew or what you were being told about the physical  
 25 condition of the plant into consequences. I used to work for

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1 a man who when I would describe a problem and sit back  
2 satisfied with having done so would say, "Therefore."  
3 Therefore, what? I am frankly surprised that, well, let me  
4 hold that back. Before I will be surprised, tell me what  
5 you --

6 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Let me answer your question.  
7 At that time we were about three or four hours into our  
8 response capability, and my sources of advice with regard  
9 to the consequences of what was transpiring at the facility  
10 were largely Bill Dornsife and Tom Gerusky of our Department  
11 of Environmental Resources.

12 Later in the day Messrs. Galena and Higgins from  
13 the NRC and Mr. Freas from the Department of Energy joined  
14 us at the briefing we had that evening in my home, but at that  
15 time Messrs. Dornsife and Gerusky were the only game in town  
16 as far as I was concerned, and I was looking to them for some  
17 assessment of precisely what was going on at this facility.

18 Our information came to them and to the Lieutenant-  
19 Governor from Metropolitan Edison, but quite frankly, the  
20 events that were occurring around noontime subsequently  
21 robbed them of considerable credibility because they had not  
22 told us what they were going to do and had not told us even  
23 at the meeting at 2:30 with the Lieutenant-Governor that they  
24 had done it, so that it became apparent to us that we were  
25 going to have to begin anew this process of casting about

1 for additional sources of information.

2 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: Let me stop you right  
3 there. What did Gerusky say about the situation, say, at  
4 2:30 when you learned of the new release?

5 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I was not at the meeting at  
6 2:30, but I saw him throughout the day, and he was very  
7 upset because of the fact that in order for him to filter  
8 the facts into recommendations to me he had to know those  
9 facts, and if he did not know when releases were going to be  
10 made from the facility, he was deprived of any ability to  
11 make meaningful recommendations.

12 We were all very much annoyed by the fact. In fact,  
13 we more or less discounted the credibility of Metropolitan  
14 Edison substantially at that point, and we stated so to the  
15 press.

16 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: Now, to express my  
17 surprise, my surprise is that in this situation where  
18 something unprecedented but obviously very dangerous has  
19 happened, potentially dangerous and where your own best  
20 advisers are in a state of confusion because you lack the  
21 information, it frankly surprises me that you did not order  
22 an evacuation out to five miles on Wednesday in that situation.

23 You were waiting for confirmation or for better  
24 understanding of the facts. I suppose I would have, had I  
25 been in your shoes, would probably have ordered the evacuation

1 first and then tried to get the facts.

2 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: There are two things to  
3 keep in mind, Commissioner. There was considerable uncertainty  
4 about what was going on at the site, but the radiation  
5 readings that we were getting were nowhere near a level that  
6 would have, I was advised by people in whose judgment I had  
7 confidence at that time, nowhere near the level where an  
8 evacuation would be called for.

9 The only time that the radiation levels anywhere  
10 near approached the, well, did not even then, but the only  
11 substantial radiation release was on Friday at which time  
12 the Collins recommendation was made and then quickly  
13 withdrawn.

14 So, our uncertainty was not whether or not there  
15 should be an evacuation. Our uncertainty was really as to  
16 what precisely was the difficulty at the reactor.

17 Now, again, I will grant you there is a school of  
18 thought that says if anything goes wrong with the reactor  
19 you had better get everybody out from five, 10, 15, 20 miles.  
20 That does not happen to be the view that I subscribe to.

21 We kept pushing. After we discounted the Met Ed  
22 as a source, we had Messrs. Galena and Higgins from the NRC  
23 there, and as I indicated, we relied upon them for another  
24 24 hours, and until we got into the difficulties of Thursday  
25 night, looked around for another source.

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1 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: You have mentioned this  
2 evacuation as if it would go out to 10 or 20 miles or whatever,  
3 100 miles. The evacuation plan, as I understand it, was for  
4 a five-mile evacuation.

5 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: That is right.

6 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: And in that five miles,  
7 I believe there are no hospitals that would have required  
8 evacuation?

9 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: That is correct.

10 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: And the population is  
11 about 15,000, something of that order?

12 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't have those figures  
13 at my fingertips at this point.

14 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: That, again, does not  
15 seem like such a big deal.

16 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: It is not a big deal if you  
17 can control it to a five-mile evacuation, but if you can look  
18 me in the eye and tell me that nobody within the 10-mile,  
19 20-mile or 50-mile area is not going to on their own begin  
20 to evacuate, when you say, "Well, five miles, gang, everything  
21 is all right outside of that," I would doubt it. I think that  
22 the nature of this event would have been such, and we had  
23 constantly in mind that there was a real possibility that  
24 you would be unable to contain an evacuation within a five-mile  
25 area because of the difference in the type of threat.

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1           If you told somebody, let me just labor this a bit,  
2 because I think it is important. Somebody within a five-mile  
3 area that is facing a flood can look and see that the water  
4 is rising and by gosh it might well cover a five-mile area,  
5 and somebody outside that five-mile area, 10 miles, 20 miles  
6 can say, "There is no way in the world ever, short of a  
7 reprise of Noah's performance that the water is going to come  
8 out 10 miles or 20 miles," but you cannot do that. You cannot  
9 convince people, and I am not sure that it is accurate to  
10 say that that same kind of analytical process can be brought  
11 to bear in the case of a radiation plume, if such there were  
12 that was extending out in one direction or another.

13           COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: Would it be your judgment  
14 then that it is essentially futile to have only five-mile  
15 evacuation plans because any trouble with a reactor may go  
16 out and affect people 100 miles away?

17           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: No, I think it is not futile  
18 at all. It is necessary, but it is well to keep in mind the  
19 limitations of that plan as distinguished from the traditional  
20 type of evacuation which all Civil Defense people say they  
21 can carry out as easy as can be.

22           This is a unique kind of situation in my mind.  
23 Perhaps you disagree, but it seems to me that there are  
24 characteristics of this type of incident that make it wholly  
25 different from an evacuation carried out in the face of a

1 flood or a fire or some other type of disaster that we are  
2 used to dealing with.

3 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: Essentially that people  
4 beyond the immediate danger zone would, also, evacuate?

5 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I think there is a danger, a  
6 very real danger that they would perceive that their health  
7 and well-being were in jeopardy as well and that you would have  
8 an unplanned evacuation that would impinge on the -- now, that  
9 is not a reason not to undertake the evacuation. Please  
10 understand, but it is a reason to factor in. That risk is  
11 something to factor in to the process of decision making,  
12 and it weighs against a precipitous evacuation of the type  
13 that might well have been and I again acknowledge that there  
14 is every reason for someone to say, "Well, if something goes  
15 wrong at a nuclear facility evacuate everybody within five,  
16 10, 15, 20 miles."

17 Interestingly enough, we have had a plethora of  
18 events reported from nuclear facilities within Pennsylvania  
19 since the Three Mile Island accident that were never reported  
20 beforehand because of a rightful sensitivity on the part of  
21 the utility and the NRC to the perceptions of people in the  
22 area, and an argument could be made that whenever anything  
23 goes wrong there should be an evacuation, in which case we  
24 would have carried out 15 or 20 evacuations since March 28.  
25 It is a very difficult judgment call, and we did the best

1 we could.

2 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: I appreciate that. The  
3 purpose of our investigation, of course, is not to second  
4 guess governors and particularly those who were sitting in the  
5 situation you were, but to try to give some counsel with  
6 respect to the future, to perhaps tell other governors why  
7 you decided what you did and what or how the decision making  
8 might have been even more effective if more information had  
9 been available.

10 Did you during this period look at the evacuation  
11 plan for this area?

12 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I had had a briefing on the  
13 evacuation plan, a cursory briefing during the first month  
14 of my administration. During the actual interval itself  
15 following March 28, I did not look at the plan. I asked  
16 Dr. Wilburn, Secretary of Budget and Administration in my  
17 administration to monitor the performance of the Emergency  
18 Management Agency in carrying out the plan, to shore up the  
19 plan where it needed it because every moment that went by  
20 gave us ample additional opportunity to improve that  
21 response capability.

22 The plan itself, it seems to me, is secondary to the  
23 capabilities of those people who are in place to carry it out.  
24 All of us have seen those nicely plastic bound plans with tabs  
25 on them telling you what to do in every eventuality, and oftentimes

1 they really fall short of the mark.

2 If you have people in place who are experienced and  
3 can exercise cool judgment during the situation they are more  
4 important than having the plan itself, and in the heat of this  
5 event I don't think that anybody was expecting to pull down  
6 a plan and find an answer to their problems, so that the plan  
7 itself, while it was on the books, had passed muster with  
8 previous administrations, I did not regard that as the be-all  
9 and end-all of our response capability as far as any  
10 evacuation that had to be carried out.

11 What I regarded as far more important was to verify  
12 that there were, in fact, specific steps being taken to  
13 supply vehicles, medical treatment, blankets, aircraft, sites  
14 where people could go, all of this was carried out or all of  
15 this assessment was carried out in close cooperation with  
16 federal officials who extended their aid to us from the  
17 beginning in determining that in the event we did have to  
18 undertake an evacuation we were in shape to do it.

19 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: Was all that in place  
20 on Wednesday?

21 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: No. There is no way in the  
22 world that you are going to have an emergency management  
23 capability in place 24 hours a day for every type of foreseeable  
24 event.

25 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: I understand, but was its

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1 absence a factor in your decision?

2 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: No, we never got that close  
3 to that weighing in. If we were in a very close call on  
4 evacuation, perhaps on Friday, that would have weighed in, but  
5 by Friday, I think that our folks had had a couple of days  
6 to begin to sharpen up their capability. So, I think that  
7 if you have to carry out an evacuation, you obviously have  
8 to do the best you can, and we would hope to have been, if that  
9 were necessary, in the best possible shape to do it, but I  
10 cannot really assess that.

11 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: One last question. Did  
12 your Attorney General or did any other lawyer with whom you  
13 talked give you an opinion as to the legal liability of the  
14 state in the event A, you ordered an evacuation or B, you did  
15 not order an evacuation?

16 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: No. I never requested any  
17 such opinion. The liability of the state, the cost that we  
18 would have to undergo would be wholly secondary to the  
19 safety of the populace and the integrity of the environment.

20 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: I can appreciate that, but  
21 the consideration itself never entered into --

22 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: No.

23 COMMISSIONER MC PHERSON: The question never arose?

24 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: No, my only discussions with  
25 the Attorney General during this entire proceeding were to have

1 him prepare in draft form documents that we might need in the  
2 event of a declaration of emergency or whatever else we could  
3 foresee.

4 His job was to see that the paperwork that would be  
5 necessary for us to act was in place. I did not ask him for  
6 any opinion, nor have I to this day asked him for any opinion  
7 on the liability. The liability would be met regardless  
8 of what the source was if we accrued it.

9 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Dr. Marks, did you have a follow  
10 on?

11 COMMISSIONER MARKS: Yes, I have one follow-on  
12 question, Governor. We have centered a good deal of the  
13 testimony today and in previous hearings on the emergency  
14 and evacuation aspects of the accident.

15 Obviously, if we are to go forward with the  
16 development of nuclear energy, we have to emphasize safety  
17 and prevention of the exposure of public to hazards, and I  
18 suspect if we had such a mode, it is likely that we would  
19 be better prepared to deal with the accidents themselves,  
20 and therefore, I wonder whether you can share with us any  
21 insights you have as to why there is such a lack of  
22 capability at the state level to deal with either the ongoing  
23 health and safety issues related to operating nuclear  
24 reactors or to the current clean-up situation at Three Mile  
25 Island?

1 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't know. You would have  
2 to ask my predecessor in office. I took office in January  
3 of this year. The event occurred in March, and what we are  
4 trying to do now is to devise a better response capability.  
5 Why that capability was allowed to deteriorate or why it was  
6 ignored, I simply cannot speculate on. I don't know.

7 COMMISSIONER MARKS: But you sense that there is  
8 this --

9 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I know Dr. McCloud --

10 COMMISSIONER MARKS: -- considerable lack of --

11 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I know Dr. McCloud feels that  
12 way, and I have no reason to contradict him at this moment.

13 COMMISSIONER MARKS: Thank you.

14 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: We will have questioning by  
15 two more Commissioners, Commissioner Trunk?

16 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: Governor, you ordered the  
17 National Guard and Civil Defense on an alert status.

18 Now, from my understanding, you would give the  
19 information to PEMA. PEMA would give it to Civil Defense,  
20 and the Civil Defense would give it to the local communities.  
21 Why then was PEMA frozen out on Friday?

22 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't know that they were.  
23 I am not really sure what you are referring to.

24 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: Colonel Henderson stated that  
25 on Friday about the time that Mr. Denton came he wasn't getting

1 any more information.

2 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I am not aware of that. So,  
3 I don't know how to respond. Colonel Henderson was, to my  
4 knowledge, in contact with the Lieutenant-Governor who is the  
5 head of the Emergency Management Council throughout the entire  
6 10-day period. So, I am not quite sure what he is referring  
7 to.

8 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: I know the Lieutenant-Governor  
9 finally went down to the Civil Defense Headquarters.

10 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I know he was there for a  
11 meeting of the Council on Friday afternoon. My records  
12 indicate that on Friday, let me see -- I am sorry, I am  
13 referring, I guess, to Thursday afternoon. Well, let us see?  
14 The Lieutenant-Governor was at PEMA at 10 o'clock Friday  
15 morning. I don't know. I am trying to temporize. The  
16 Lieutenant-Governor was in more direct contact with PEMA than  
17 I was throughout the entire event. So, I cannot really  
18 answer the question, but I don't know of any inclination on,  
19 certainly on my part or on the Lieutenant-Governor's part to  
20 freeze out, as you put it, Colonel Henderson or the PEMA  
21 superstructure. They were our operating arm, insofar as  
22 emergency management went.

23 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: Colonel Henderson said that  
24 they were getting calls from people, and they just were not  
25 able to answer them because they did not know anything.

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1 GOVERNOR THORNEBURGH: We were in the same position.  
2 During Friday there was a considerable amount of uncertainty  
3 as to precisely what was going on, and we did not make any  
4 public statements until that evening when Mr. Denton had  
5 arrived and was able to inform us as to precisely what was  
6 going on, at which time we held a briefing for the press on the  
7 theory that that was the best way to acquaint the general  
8 populace with what the situation was.

9 It was a very turbulent time, and as I stated  
10 previously, it was our policy not to run with every last  
11 snippet or rumor or bit of information to the public but to  
12 gather what we felt were the sound facts and present them  
13 to them as Mr. Denton and I did on Friday evening.

14 It was very difficult to respond to every inquiry  
15 that we were getting, and I think that difficulty was at its  
16 height on Friday, March 30.

17 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: I know.

18 We have a Civil Defense station. Couldn't it have  
19 been a good idea to activate it and give an hourly evaluation  
20 of what was happening? I mean we depended solely on your  
21 daily press releases and the media, and then at night when  
22 we would listen to Cronkite or somebody like that we would  
23 go to sleep afraid.

24 Wouldn't it have been a good idea for the state to  
25 sort of give us some relief, even if it was the same thing

1 over and over again?

2 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: As I stated, I suppose there  
3 are two schools of thought, that every hour you ought to tell  
4 what you know, whether you are satisfied it is accurate or not.

5 I believe I dealt with the dilemma that you are in  
6 when you are not sure of your information. Do you have an  
7 obligation to pass it on to the public, nonetheless? I don't  
8 know what the answer is. Our choice was to, on Friday, in  
9 particular, when there was so much uncertainty, to wait until  
10 we had received an assessment from Mr. Denton of precisely  
11 what was going on, on the theory that a wait, a delay to  
12 provide accurate information is better than the periodic  
13 supplying of misinformation.

14 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: But if the state or you or  
15 your press were giving the reports, I mean we believed you.  
16 So, getting it on the hourly basis would have been just as  
17 good as waiting.

18 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: We just did not have reliable  
19 information, Commissioner, and I just -- that was our problem.  
20 We did not know until we had a thorough briefing from  
21 Mr. Denton, first by phone in the afternoon and then later  
22 that evening what the situation was.

23 Now, I suppose I could go on every hour and say,  
24 "We really don't know what is going on here, folks, but" --

25 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: I don't mean just you, but

1 Friday was not the only bad day. We had a very bad day on  
2 Sunday. The rumor in Middletown was that we would have a  
3 six-hour leeway to get out. That did not leave us very  
4 comfortable, and we were waiting for you, and then I remember  
5 waiting for you to come on, and they said, "Well, the  
6 Governor is coming on," and it would go on another 15 minutes,  
7 and yes, we are waiting for the Governor, you know, and I  
8 think we waited about an hour before you finally came on.

9 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: That hour was spent, I must  
10 say, in trying to make sure that what we did present to the  
11 public was as accurate as could be. Sunday was the day that  
12 the President was there. It was a busy day for us. We came  
13 to Middletown. We met with the press and the public there  
14 after the visit with President and Mrs. Carter to the site.  
15 I am certainly not here to try to convince you and other  
16 residents of the area that we did an apple pie perfect job,  
17 but I think it is important to recognize the difficulties  
18 that I dealt with in some context of what you do when you  
19 are in a highly volatile situation, and you are not sure of  
20 the facts.

21 We frequently would give our best estimate of the  
22 facts and then have to come back at the next briefing and say,  
23 "Well, that was wrong, and in fact, here is what happened."

24 We were having the same kinds of problems that you  
25 were in some respects. I wish it were otherwise. I wish

1 there were a capacity that we could instantaneously determine  
2 the facts and assess their veracity, but really that is not  
3 the case.

4 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: I am not criticizing you. I  
5 just --

6 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: There is room for criticism.  
7 Don't get me wrong. I think there is plenty of room for  
8 criticism.

9 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: There is also one other thing.  
10 Do you think it is fair for the communities around the area  
11 of a nuclear plant to be the last to know that an incident  
12 has happened?

13 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I certainly would not think  
14 that would be fair, although I am not sure that that was the  
15 case here. Colonel Henderson informed me that PEMA during  
16 the early morning hours of March 28, notified all of the  
17 county officials and the county officials' responsibility then  
18 is to notify people in the community.

19 Now, you are going to miss certain individuals.  
20 I was greatly distressed to learn that Amish residents of  
21 Lancaster County, for example, who have no radio and no  
22 newspaper, no access to the outside world did not have timely  
23 notice of an event that might well have affected them.

24 The information dissemination problems are enormous,  
25 but believe me, they are nowhere near as enormous as the

1 information accumulation problems.

2 In order to get information out, you have to have  
3 it in the first place, and I am, from my vantage point  
4 terribly concerned that the process of gathering information  
5 that is accurate and reliable be greatly enhanced in the  
6 event that this kind of event has to be dealt with again.

7 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: I just cannot see Met Ed is  
8 two, three miles away from Middletown. They had to call  
9 Harrisburg. Harrisburg in turn calls Middletown. I mean  
10 they sort of go over us and then come back. Why couldn't  
11 we be notified about the same time you are?

12 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't know. It is certainly  
13 physically possible. Whether it is desirable or not, I don't  
14 know. As I say, the information dissemination problems are  
15 extremely difficult.

16 COMMISSIONER TRUNK: There is one more thing I  
17 wanted to ask. Since you put the National Guard on the  
18 alert status, did you realize that the personnel in the  
19 vicinity of Harrisburg were not available? I mean I am  
20 getting this from the Patriot News on August 9, where they  
21 said that the National Guard ranks were very thin.

22 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't know. General Scott  
23 who is the Adjutant General, the Commandant of the National  
24 Guard was part of our response team. He raised no such  
25 question with me. So, I just simply don't know, I am afraid,

1 Commissioner.

2           COMMISSIONER TRUNK: There is, also, a statement  
3 here that the Adjutant General guarantees that no National  
4 Guard will go into an area that is exposed to dangerous  
5 levels of radiation or fallout. I am under the impression  
6 that a National Guard would be called out in case we had a  
7 larger accident. How far away would they be from us and  
8 helping us?

9           I mean since they would not be able to go into  
10 Middletown or Gouldsboro, how would they help us?

11           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I am not really -- I think  
12 you would have to ask General Scott. I am not familiar  
13 with the logistics of troop movements in the event of an  
14 emergency.

15           COMMISSIONER TRUNK: Should the National Guard be  
16 given such a guaranty?

17           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I am not sure what the  
18 guaranty is. It is reported in the newspaper that what?

19           COMMISSIONER TRUNK: It says, "You can assure your  
20 wives and families that the Adjutant General of Pennsylvania  
21 will not, I repeat, will not assign Pennsylvania National  
22 Guard personnel to missions or in areas where the possibility  
23 exists that they may be exposed to dangerous levels of  
24 radiation or fallout."

25           GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I am not fam<sup>1759</sup> w<sup>25</sup> that

1 statement or that policy. I will look into it, but I am  
2 not quite sure what he is driving at, and I really would not  
3 want to rely on what is in the newspaper account.

4 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: I think Commissioner Trunk is  
5 asking an absolutely key question here. Wouldn't that  
6 present a very major dilemma if one depends on the National  
7 Guard to help citizens get out of such an area?

8 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't know what dangerous  
9 levels of radiation are. If you are talking about -- there  
10 were not dangerous levels of radiation at any time, as I was  
11 advised during this incident, if we had to undertake an  
12 evacuation that they would be available, but I would want  
13 to refine that statement a lot more before I assessed.

14 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Yes, I am sure this did not  
15 refer to the incident because it speaks about the future  
16 as I heard you quote it, Commissioner Trunk, and not about  
17 the past. That does raise a rather odd issue as to whether  
18 as you are trying to get people out of -- obviously if it is  
19 lethal, it is one kind of situation.

20 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Yes.

21 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: But suppose you have some in between  
22 kind of situation. If those who you count on to be most  
23 helpful to the citizens are being protected first, it seems  
24 to me it is women and children last.

25 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: That certainly is not my

1 feeling, and again, I had not heard of this before, and I am  
2 not really sure what General Scott meant by that statement,  
3 but clearly no National Guardsmen, no Pennsylvania Emergency  
4 Management personnel, no one in state government is going  
5 to abandon people in a dangerous area. Our responsibility  
6 is emergency management, and I can rest reasonably assured  
7 that that is not what he meant by that statement.

8 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: Governor Babbitt?

9 COMMISSIONER BABBITT: Governor Thornburgh, in  
10 the transcript of your interview prior to today, you indicated  
11 that there was a discussion on Wednesday of the risks of an  
12 evacuation, and you made specific reference to a flood  
13 evacuation and to a discussion with Gordon McCloud about the  
14 Colorado situation. I wonder if you could identify those  
15 two incidents for me and if you can recollect what specific  
16 discussions or lessons you drew from discussing those two  
17 incidents?

18 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't have any particular  
19 recollection of specific conversations. What we were looking  
20 at on Wednesday in the context of a possible evacuation  
21 was what risks were there, and my best recollection is that  
22 Bill Scranton, the Lieutenant-Governor had been in the  
23 Wilkes Barre area during the Agnes, Hurricane Agnes floods  
24 during which there was a sizable evacuation undertaken.

25 Gordon had talked to someone, and then had talked



1 to Jay Waldman who had talked to me about an evacuation  
2 that had been undertaken, as I remember in Colorado, but  
3 what we were looking at was trying to gather as much  
4 information as we could from wherever source we could to  
5 catalog the kinds of things we ought to be concerned about in  
6 an evacuation, and the thing that impressed, was impressed  
7 most on me was that when you evacuate, you are not just  
8 talking about the evacuation of able-bodied adult men and  
9 women, that there are an awful lot of people with special  
10 needs that would have to be provided for especially during  
11 an evacuation and that the risk of death or injury to those  
12 persons was substantially greater than it was to the populace  
13 at large.

14 So, I don't think that we really had much of a  
15 seminar on evacuations, but we tried to pick up as much  
16 information as we could from whomever had the experience.

17 COMMISSIONER RABBITT: Was there any suggestion  
18 that the Colorado situation was a radiological emergency?

19 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: I don't remember. That is an  
20 offhand recollection of mine, Governor. Jay Waldman, my  
21 Executive Assistant or Gordon McCloud might be better  
22 to answer that. I just don't know at the present time.

23 CHAIRMAN KEMENY: May I just make a brief announcement  
24 before we adjourn for today?

25 The remaining hearing schedule is that we will be

1 in hearing all day tomorrow, that is morning until about  
2 6 p.m., in the afternoon and then Thursday morning, and the  
3 subject will be the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

4 Governor Thornburgh, may we thank you very much  
5 on behalf of the Commission for appearing, and we are recessed  
6 with these hearings until 9 a.m. tomorrow morning.

7 GOVERNOR THORNBURGH: Thank you.

8 (Thereupon, at 11:13 a.m., a recess was taken  
9 until 9 a.m., the following day, Wednesday, August 22, 1979.)  
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