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United States Senate

COMMITTEE ON
GOVERNMENTAL AFFAIRS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY, NUCLEAR
PROLIFERATION AND FEDERAL SERVICES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20510

February 6, 1979

Dr. Joseph Hendrie
Commissioner
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Dr. Hendrie:

As you are aware, this Subcommittee has been actively examining federal agency responsibilities in the area of nuclear waste management with a view to ensuring the most effective and efficient relationships among the agencies involved. As is true in the field of nuclear exports, I believe the role of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, as an independent body responsible to both Administration and the Congress, can provide a most important check on federal nuclear waste policies and programs to ensure the health and safety of the public.

With this in mind and in preparation for Subcommittee hearings to be held at an early date, I would like to obtain the Commission's views on the following subjects.

First, in commenting on the report of the Interagency Review Group, the Commission reiterated its position taken initially in response to a petition from the Natural Resources Defense Council, that it would "not continue to license reactors if it did not have reasonable confidence that the waste can and will in due course be disposed of safely." The comments continued that, "The Commission is committed to reassessing its basis for confidence as new data are developed and progress is made in the Federal program. The Commission will keep Congress and the President informed of any changes that significantly affect its confidence that wastes can be disposed of safely."

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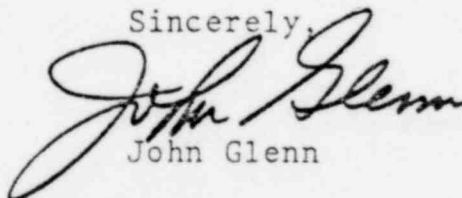
The Subcommittee is aware that recently developed scientific information concerning, for example, the use of salt as a medium for locating a geologic nuclear waste repository and the integrity of vitrified material as a nuclear waste form, has called into question a number of fundamental tenets of federal nuclear waste policy as it existed at the time of the Commission's response to the NRDC petition in July 1977. Accordingly I would like to be advised as to the Commission's state of confidence at the present time that nuclear waste materials will be safely cared for, the basis for this confidence, and any steps the Commission intends to take in its licensing process to reflect its present thinking on this matter.

Secondly, testimony before this Subcommittee during the past year revealed that extensive research and development into a host of issues relating to the permanent disposal of nuclear wastes must be undertaken prior to the construction and operation of any nuclear waste repository. Obtaining answers to many of these outstanding questions will obviously be of crucial importance to the Commission in performing its health and safety reviews of such facilities, as well as in developing broadly applicable standards and criteria. Obviously, the Commission itself will not perform much of this research; however, I believe that as a user of research and development information in the nuclear waste management field, the Commission's regulatory efforts can be seriously affected by the scope and direction of federal R&D efforts, wherever undertaken. In this regard I would like to be informed of the Commission's views as to the principal areas where additional R&D on nuclear waste is needed over the next several years and the pace at which these R&D efforts need to be undertaken so as to complement the Commission's licensing and regulatory activities on a timely basis.

Because the Subcommittee anticipates holding hearings on this matter within the month I would appreciate your response no later than February 23, 1979.

Best regards.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John Glenn". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

John Glenn

JG/lcj

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