



OFFICE OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS

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COUNTY COMMISSIONERS
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April 20, 1979

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

Dear Dr. Hendrie:

As a local elected official in an area which is faced with the probability of co-existence with the proposed plant at Marble Hill, I feel a responsibility to be an advocate for the welfare of Jefferson County's residents despite the absence of any direct jurisdiction. Certainly we must all share concern about the adequacy of technological safeguards and the thoroughness with which existing plants and those under construction are being monitored by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission.

Further construction on the Marble Hill plant should be halted, until the special investigatory commission established by President Carter last week submits its report and recommendations.

The composition of the executive staff of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission should be reassessed with the goal of increased objectivity. A number of NRC executives served in a nuclear promotional capacity with the now defunct Atomic Energy Commission when it was established. It had inherently conflicting responsibilities. It was established to regulate the result of its own research and development. This situation continued until 1974 when the two functions were separated into the Energy Research and Development Administration and the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. However, some observers fear that staff members who spent so many years promoting atomic energy will have difficulty objectively regulating it. In the April 16 issue of "Time" magazine, it is reported that a 1975 Common Cause study found that 65% of staff members with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission had been formerly employed by companies which held licenses or contracts with the Commission. The NRC's ability to regulate safety must not be compromised by an enthusiasm for rapid nuclear plant development.

The federal government should spend more money researching energy alternatives, with an expanded nuclear emphasis being one of a number of options. Perhaps we should be more aggressive in developing energy alternatives such as coal, solar and geothermal power. Surely a nation which can put men on the moon can develop all our energy alternatives. In the twenty years since the National Aeronautics and Space Administration

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Dr. Joseph M. Hendrie
April 20, 1979
Page Two

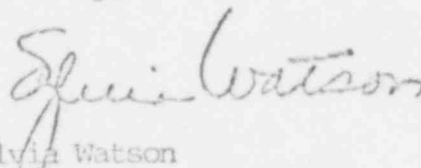
began, the federal government has appropriated roughly 57.5 billion dollars for space exploration research. By contrast, less than one-fifth the NASA appropriation or 10.3 billion dollars, has been spent on civilian nuclear energy research from 1940 through 1979. In conjunction with expanded research in the area of nuclear technology and its alternatives, the unsettling dilemma of nuclear waste transportation and disposal must be resolved.

Local communities should establish independent monitoring systems for nuclear reactors located nearby. Communities which have been excluded from plant selection processes can nonetheless exercise considerable control over their own safety. Technical monitoring of air and water content can be conducted by regional representative bodies or individuals designated for that purpose. In combination with air and water sampling, I believe local communities should extract an agreement from the utility at the point of licensing prior to actual plant operation allowing periodic on-site examination of plant equipment and procedures. We here in Jefferson County will have that opportunity if Marble Hill construction is completed.

The three-member panels authorized to conduct hearings preparatory to Nuclear Regulatory Commission licensing of power plants should be expanded to include at least one citizen member. Section 191 of the Atomic Energy Act authorizes these panels and constitutes them to consist of one attorney trained in administrative law and two technical members such as nuclear engineers or physicists. I am in favor of amending that law to mandate the inclusion of a citizen member to these hearing panels.

In the weeks and months to come the events at Three Mile Island will be the subject of much speculation and a number of investigations. Regardless of any explanatory rhetoric or assignment of blame which may result, one thing is clear: the technology failed. We must all assume the responsibility for making sure it does not fail again.

Sincerely,



Sylvia Watson
Commissioner
"A" District

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