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SE2

January 17, 1980

John F. Ahearne  
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission  
1717 H Street, NW  
Washington, D.C. 20555

Dear Mr. Ahearne:

Scientists and Engineers for Secure Energy (SE2) supports President Carter's view, of December 8, 1979, that "we must resume the licensing process promptly so that new [nuclear] plants, which we need to reduce our dependence on foreign oil, can be built and operated."

SE2 also urges that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission proceed without delay with the licensing of those plants which have already been built and are ready for fueling. We do so for several reasons:

1. All of the various committees and study groups that have investigated Three Mile Island have found that its shortcomings were related predominantly to human factors, such as operator performance, regulatory framework, governmental response, and general attitudes of the mind. Equipment problems (valve operation, panel arrangement, etc.), which caused or contributed to the malfunction, were of secondary importance. Most of the suggested improvements are in the areas of governmental preparedness, emergency response, operator training, and regulatory procedures--all of which are general in nature and not specific to the operation of particular plants.

We see no reason why the licensing process should be delayed while the Commission sorts out shortcomings which are other than technological. We therefore submit that the licensing of the individual, completed nuclear power units should proceed simultaneously with the efforts of the NRC to improve its overall safety posture.

CHAPTER MEMBERS (partial listing): Robert K. Adair, Yale; Henry H. Barschall, U of Wisconsin; Hans A. Bethe, Cornell; Felix Bloch, Stanford; David Bodansky, U of Washington; Norris E. Bradbury, Los Alamos; D. Allan Bromley, Yale; R. Creighton Buck, U of Wisconsin; Bernard L. Cohen, U of Pittsburgh; Thomas E. Connolly, Stanford; John D. Courtney, Louisiana State U; Dwight E. Damon, U of Connecticut; R. H. Dicke, Princeton; Albert Gold, NY Polytechnic; Robert Hexter, U of Minnesota; Robert Hofstadter, Stanford; Behran Kursunoglu, U of Miami; Robert Lee, Hartford; W. F. Libby, UCLA; John McCarthy, Stanford; John F. Madison, Argonne; Robert S. Mulliken, U of Chicago; Ernest C. Follard, Penn State U; James Rainwater, Columbia U; Norman C. Rasmussen, MIT; Malcolm J. Sherman, SUNY Albany; Edward Teller, Livermore; James A. Van Allen, U of Iowa; Eugene F. Wagner, Princeton; Richard Wilson, Harvard; Werner Wolf, Yale. \*Affiliation for identification only. \*Member, STEERING COMMITTEE.

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2. It is our judgment that the necessary safety improvements can be developed and implemented safely without delaying the growth of our nuclear power production. Nuclear hardware is designed and constructed with a degree of forethought and caution unparalleled in technological history. According to the conclusion of the President's Commission on TMI, though the accident at Three Mile Island was serious, the current state of nuclear technology proved sufficient to insure the physical safety of the surrounding population. As the report indicates, the results of the event were neither catastrophic nor near-catastrophic. We are confident that nuclear power, having accumulated an excellent safety record, can be made even more reliable and secure without our having to interrupt its current expansion programs. We favor the orderly introduction of new facilities with the continuing improvement of existing units.

3. We are facing events which may lead to a sudden drying-up of some major sources of crude oil. The potential consequences of this for the economics of the United States and the West may be disastrous unless we promptly put to use every other available source of energy. Viewed in this context, the potential risks of using and expanding nuclear power truly are miniscule when compared with the real risks that face us if we do not continue to develop our nuclear option.

As the President, himself, has pointed out, the nuclear plants which remain idle despite their completion could save the country 200,000 barrels of oil per day. The finishing of plants under construction would further reduce our dependence on foreign oil, and contribute to easing our chronic foreign-trade imbalance.

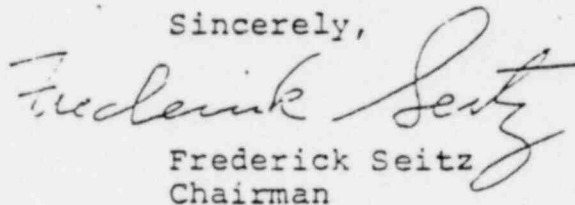
Last fall, the Commission expressed readiness to resume its licensing of nuclear plants. More recently, however, it seems to have moved in the opposite direction, and has mentioned delays of possibly up to two years. Surely this vacillation by the Commission is not justifiable by scientific fact; nor does such a performance by a regulatory agency enhance its credibility with the public. It appears to some that the Commission has succumbed to its own perception of the political climate in nuclear matters.

SE2, however, reads a more encouraging atmosphere for nuclear energy: the Congress, for example, has repeatedly refused to initiate nuclear power-related moratoria, and has agreed with the need for putting the completed plants into operation; states are increasingly urging the Federal Government to take leadership in the advancement of nuclear power. For example, New York's Governor Carey has recently requested the government to "act quickly to give this nation a sense of confidence in nuclear energy."

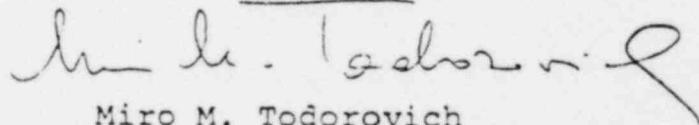
A heavy and singular burden lies on the shoulders of the NRC. The current licensing inaction of your Commission may preclude the availability of future critical options for the United States. Thus, the de facto responsibility of the NRC at this time greatly transcends the narrow confines of its statutory obligations. We, of SE2, feel that the Nuclear Regulatory Commission should act with conviction on the basis of its understanding of scientific fact, and proceed to discharge with alacrity its legally mandated duty--the licensing of power plants within an established, regulatory framework--while incorporating simultaneously into the process the new insights from the TMI experience.

Attached is a telegram, recently sent to the President, and signed by six academic scientists, which comments on the subject matter raised in this communication.

Sincerely,



Frederick Seitz  
Chairman



Miro M. Todorovich  
Executive Secretary

Telegram: President of the United States

The Iranian crisis will cause a severe oil shortage in the coming year. The consequences of this could be alleviated by putting into operation the six nuclear plants which are completed and ready for use. There is no reasonable doubt that they can be operated safely. Their energy output will replace 200,000 barrels of oil per day -- a substantial part of the oil previously imported from Iran. We urge you to do all in your power to have these plants operating as soon as possible.

Nuclear plants now under construction, when operating, will replace several times the amount of oil imported from Iran during 1978. These plants should be completed and in operation as soon as possible.

Hans Bethe  
Tom Pigford  
Fred Seitz  
Edward Teller  
Alvin Weinberg  
Eugene Wigner