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COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS
U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

April 2, 1981

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Mr. Ivan Smith, Chairman
Atomic Safety and Licensing Board
(TMI-1 Restart)
Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, D.C. 20555



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Dear Mr. Smith:

It has recently come to my attention that you received testimony on February 18 with regard to the question of reporting of information during the accident at TMI-2. The hearing transcript indicates some uncertainty as to whether the Interior Committee majority staff report, Reporting of Information Concerning the Accident at Three Mile Island, is a draft or final report. The report with page 247 dated Janaury 29, 1981 is final. While some revisions may be made as the report goes to press, the conclusions as stated on page 247 will remain unchanged.

I commend this report to your attention. In order that my own position on this matter be clear I will reiterate a statement I made to the NRC Commissioners on the occasion of a hearing on February 24 before the House Interior Committee's Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment:

Let me comment quickly on the matter of reporting failures that occurred during the episode at Three Mile Island. These failures could have resulted in unnecessarily large radiation exposures to the public if a major radiological release had occurred on March 28, 1979. During the period when the NRC and State of Pennsylvania were given inaccurate and misleading information, the actual conditions at the plant were such that there was substantial risk that a major radiological release would occur. Yet, the Commission was in the dark for more than two days as to the severity of the accident.



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This is something that we, along with other investigations, looked into with great depth, and I frankly do not like what has been revealed. The reporting failures called into question the fundamental premise on which we are told that the regulatory framework is founded, and that premise is that licensees will voluntarily provide State and Federal officials with information affecting the public health and safety.

It seems to me that you would have considered that one of your primary responsibilities [was to get to the bottom] of why the reporting failures occurred but the NRC and staff showed little inclination to do so. After considerable prodding from our end the Commission eventually did conduct an investigation which led to action by the Commission majority which makes little sense to me. . . .

In my view, your statements and the report prepared by the Office of Inspection and Enforcement have had the effect of obscuring the issue. The result is to cast doubt on your ability to confront difficult issues and to be even-handed in your regulatory decisions.

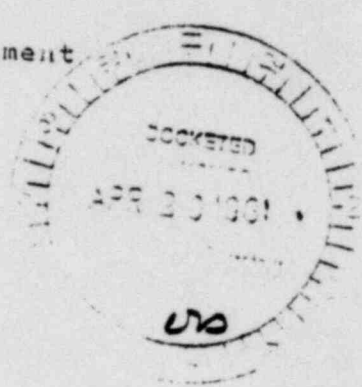
I am also enclosing herein statements with regard to this matter made at the February 24 hearing by members of the Advisory Committee on Reactor Safeguards.

Sincerely,

MORRIS K. UDALL
Chairman

Enclosure

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5 HEARINGS ON THE NUCLEAR REGULATORY COMMISSION
6 AUTHORIZATION FOR FISCAL YEARS 1982 AND 1983
7 TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 24, 1981
8 U. S. House of Representatives,
9 Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment
10 of the Committee on Interior and
11 Insular Affairs,
12 Washington, D. C.
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15 The subcommittee met, pursuant to notice, in room 1324
16 Longworth House Office Building, commencing at 9:56 a.m.,
17 Honorable Morris K. Udall (Chairman of the Full Committee,
18 and of the Subcommittee on Energy and the Environment)
19 presiding.

3199 Island which had the responsibility there. Our
3200 investigations have shown that a lot of other companies and
3201 operators have a much higher level of training and much
3202 higher level of sophistication and precautions against
3203 accident than other utilities.

3204 Is there a large variety or large difference or are these
3205 relatively narrow things in terms of equipment, the
3206 abilities of staff, and the people they need to really run a
3207 safe reactor? Or, are they about all the same in safety? I
3208 guess that is what I am really asking, are they about all
3209 the same in safety? Dr. Plesset?

3210 Dr. Plesset. I would be glad to make a comment and then,
3211 of course, defer to my colleagues.

3212 I think there is a big variation in technical capabilities
3213 of different groups or utilities to run nuclear power plants
3214 safely.

3215 I think that this must be--if I may be less diplomatic than
3216 perhaps the Commissioners were--why TMI-1 has been hanging so
3217 long. That organization has shown itself to be not very
3218 effective, and in particular I read the record of your
3219 committee and it brings out very clearly a couple things
3220 that are very astonishing. On the very first day of the
3221 accident they were aware that things were not going right,
3222 as they could not deal with them because of the interference
3223 they interposed between the safety systems in the plant.

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3224 They knew the temperatures in the hot leg were such that
3225 they only had dry steam at that point. They made
3226 measurements at thermocouples, measurements in-core which
3227 indicated very high temperatures, and they made these not
3228 once but several times.

3229 It is kind of incredible to me that they did not know what
3230 it meant. It is further incredible to me that they did not
3231 make a big to do about it by talking to the NRC immediately
3232 about it. I don't understand this. I just have to leave it
3233 at that point.

3234 The other thing that also happened on the first day, of
3235 course, was the hydrogen burn and it seems as though several
3236 of them, including the station superintendent in the first
3237 day as I mentioned, they were aware there had been a
3238 hydrogen burn and yet it did not get discussed in any detail
3239 with responsible people in the NRC. I find that also quite
3240 incredible.

3241 The Chairman. It really troubled me, yes, and we all know
3242 of some of the correspondence you refer to. Any final
3243 comments? Dr. Siess?

3244 Dr. Siess. You know, I think there are clearly some
3245 differences in the way plants are run. I don't know whether
3246 it's a difference in the technical skills or difference in
3247 the management attitude, but I am inclined to think a lot of
3248 it is in the latter.

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3249 I have seen it related to size, and I can not believe that
3250 it is the telling factor. We have had 3 incidents that have
3251 gotten a lot of publicity, for example, TMI, to name one of
3252 them; the other 2 occurred in the TVA reactor and the TVA is
3253 certainly one of the biggest and best staffed and best
3254 managed technical organizations around.

3255 So I don't think we have zeroed in on the cause of the
3256 differences but I am sure there are differences.
3257

3258 Dr. Mark. I think I would like to add a very small
3259 comment. I am not sure if I am more charitable or less
3260 charitable than Milton. I am much afraid, in connection
3261 with the Three Mile Island people, of what they understood
3262 and what they did not say. I guess I think they really were
3263 that dumb and that is maybe less charitable, but in another
3264 way you might say it is more charitable. I worry about
3265 assuming that they understood obvious things which were
3266 clear to everybody else, at least a couple days later.

3267 Certainly the NRC people were there and they were in a
3268 position to see things if they had their eyes open or minds
3269 in gear but there is no evidence that they did, although
3270 there was a hydrogen burn. I would have made my own
3271 assumption that Mr. Miller did not know it was a hydrogen
3272 burn, or that somebody in the back room just said, "Maybe
3273 it's hydrogen." But I did not get the feeling that that
was going to close a logical switch for him.

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That is just an emotion, a reaction.

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Dr. Plesset. It is clear our Chairman is more cheritable than the past-Chairman.

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Dr. Mark. I am not sure. But there are differences in plant and you meet this face to face at the ACRS when they come and bring their own people to discuss a construction permit or operating permit or a problem and some of them are just very much in touch with what is needed to be in touch

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The Chairman. Let me touch on one other thing then I really have to close the hearing. I raised a question this morning of whether there is a valid reason why TMI-1 which was an operating reactor, apparently had some history of operating safely in any event, why it should still be closed down after 2 years? Is there something special about that relationship or would we always close it down, that is, if you got a pair of them should you always close down one if you have a LOCA or severe event in the other?

Dr. Plesset?

Dr. Plesset. I think this relates to the point just discussed. I think that both Three Mile Island-1 and TMI-2 represent a management that was incredibly incompetent and

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3299 be even dishonest. I think that means that you have a
3300 different attitude towards that license or re-license than
3301 you would towards continued operation of, for example,
3302 Rancho Seco or Davis-Bessie. I think it's quite different.
3303

3304 Dr. Mark. I think the technical features of that plant,
3305 if in trusted hands, and in a politically possible climate,
3306 are such that there is no reason why that plant could not
3307 have been turned on in the summer of 1979, except for these
3308 very real reasons. But they are not mechanical.
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3310 The Chairman. Gentleman, you do good work, and I think
3311 the country is glad, as I am, that you are on the job and
3312 giving of your time at the ACRS and I thank you for giving
3313 of your time here today. We will no doubt have you back
3314 here again.

3314 Thank you very much.

3315 The subcommittee is adjourned.

3316 Whereupon, at 2:36 p.m., the subcommittee adjourned to
3317 the call of the Chair.

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