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Mr. John W. N. Hickey; Chief, Enrichment Branch
Division of Fuel Cycle Safety and Safeguards
Office of Nuclear Material Safety and Safeguards, Mailstop 4-E-4
U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission
Washington, DC 20555

Dear Mr. Hickey:

I have recently seen a copy of the Summary and Conclusions of the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) for the Claiborne Enrichment Center proposed for Claiborne Parish, Louisiana. The following comments are based on that reading. My credentials for making the comments include 6 years with the Atomic Energy Commission (1948-54), the last 4 years as Chief, Metallurgy and Materials Branch, Division of Research; 25 years with the Research and Development Center of the General Electric Co. at Schenectady; and after retirement the authorship of a book for lay readers on nuclear and electromagnetic radiation entitled "Our Radiant World" published by Iowa State University Press in 1986.

I believe the concept of a privately owned and operated centrifuge plant for enrichment of uranium is a very sound one. It will permit lower use of the inefficient gaseous diffusion plants and lessen U.S. dependence on foreign sources of supply. There appears to be extensive evidence that centrifuge plants of this nature can be safely operated, and this appears to be borne out by the DEIS. Uranium is a relatively benign radioactive material naturally present in substantial quantities, and provided reasonable care is taken in its handling I see no serious environmental consequences from this plant.

I have somewhat greater concern for the concentrations of fluorine which the plant will have to handle and believe major effort should be made to be certain that leakage of UF_6 is kept to an absolute minimum. I also note that it is stated that "removal and disposition of DUF_6 may involve its conversion offsite to U_3O_8 ". It seems to me that such conversion should definitely be required so that very long time storage of UF_6 can be avoided along with the risk of corrosion and leakage from the storage tanks involved.

With this caveat I urge you to approve the construction of the proposed plant. I believe it is needed and can be operated safely.

Sincerely yours,

David W. Lillie

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