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CONGRESS OF MICRONESIA
SAIYAN, MARIANA ISLANDS, 96990

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SPECIAL JOINT COMMITTEE
CONCERNING RONGELAP &
UTIRIK ATOLLS
(Public Law 4C-33)Senator Olympia T. Tonia, Chairman
Representative Timothy Gikera
Representative Hans Weiland

April 23, 1973

The Chairman
The Atomic Energy Commission
Washington, D.C. 20545

Dear Mr. Chairman:

I am taking the liberty of forwarding to you under cover of this letter a copy of my Committee's report concerning the people of Rongelap and Utirik Atolls of the Marshall Islands District who were exposed to radiation as a result of an H-bomb test at Bikini Atoll on March 1, 1954.

The report and the recommendations were duly adopted by the Congress of Micronesia during the First Regular Session of the Fifth Congress. I hope you will have the time to personally review the contents of this report and that you will find it both interesting and informative.

As you may know, the Special Joint Committee Concerning Rongelap and Utirik Atolls of the Congress of Micronesia was created because of a concern by members of Congress about the medical treatment of the people of those islands. The Committee was created by Public Law No. 4C-33, and its life extended to March 30, 1975, by the Congress of Micronesia on February 26, 1973, by passage of House Joint Resolution No. 73. The Committee was duly organized after the 1972 annual survey by the Brookhaven National Laboratory medical team was halted in March. Since that time, as is recounted in our report, the Committee has worked together with the Trust Territory Government and Dr. Robert A. Conard of Brookhaven to help complete the annual survey in September of 1972. This survey, at the Committee's request, included four additional doctors: Dr. William S. Cole of the Bureau of Radiological Health through the assistance of former Surgeon General Jesse L. Steinfeld, Dr. Haruo Ezeki of Hiroshima University, Dr. Toshiyuki Kumatori of the Japanese National Institute for Radiological Sciences, and Dr. E. Eric Pechin, C.B.E., F.R.C.P., who was recommended by the World Health Organization.

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During February of 1973 our report was presented to the Congress of Micronesia. During that same session of the Congress, the Committee also introduced Senate Bill No. 89, A Bill for an Act...

"To provide for certain care and benefits to the people of Rongelap and Utirik Atolls exposed to the March 1, 1954 H-bomb test fallout; to provide for care and benefits to certain other people from Rongelap and Utirik, and for other purposes."

This bill, a copy of which is enclosed with this letter, became Public Law No. 5-52 on April 11, 1973. You will note that "Section 10. Expenses" directs the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory to "seek an executive agreement with the Atomic Energy Commission whereby the expenses incurred under the provisions of this act will be defrayed either directly or on a reimbursable basis by the Atomic Energy Commission and report his findings no later than thirty days after the effective date of this act."

I would thus, as one of the primary purposes of this letter, wish to express the Committee's support of any request made by the High Commissioner of the Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands for financial support of the intent of this bill. By virtue of the Committee's introduction of the measure and the High Commissioner's signing of this bill into law, the law represents a concerted effort by both the executive and legislative branches of our government to secure such support from your agency for these unfortunate people. We are hopeful for a favorable response for a number of reasons, among them:

* The maximum amount it would cost per year has been estimated at about \$10,000.

* These additional examinations would be productive for the Brookhaven National Laboratory studies carried out by Dr. Conard and his team, and thus, indirectly beneficial to the Commission.

* The Commission's support of this funding would be good public relations since it is a demonstration of goodwill and would indicate to the Utrikese and Rongelapese that it was willing to discharge its obligations to them. We feel this is only right and proper since the Commission shares the legal and moral responsibility for their original exposure.

We believe the Commission will see the logic of providing such support and will realize the goodwill it will generate and will thus act positively as regards the High Commissioner's request.

Related to the above request, we would like to ask the Commission what support it would be able to give directly or otherwise in recruiting a medical doctor with a background in radiation-induced disease and stationing him in the Marshall Islands District. At present, Dr. Knudsen

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of Brookhaven is stationed on Kwajalein for a one year period which will expire sometime in June of this year. The purpose of Dr. Knudsen's presence is to conduct interim minor examinations of the Rongelapese and Utiirikese, to gather vital statistics, and to insure that the people are taking their prescribed medication. Such time as Dr. Knudsen has free from this work, he assists Trust Territory Medical personnel at the facilities at Rongerik in the Kwajalein Atoll or on Majuro. It is the Committee's understanding that Dr. Knudsen will not be available for this purpose after June. Dr. Conard has also related to us that it will be extremely difficult to find a replacement for him. Both the Committee and the people of Rongelap and Utiirik, however, are quite insistent that they would like to have an "AEC" doctor replace Dr. Knudsen. We feel that it would be especially relevant now, in view of the death last November of
from acute myelogenous leukemia.

Again, such a move would not only be physically and psychologically beneficial to the people involved, but also would benefit Brookhaven and the Commission. We believe that while the recruitment of such a person might be somewhat difficult, it is not impossible. As mentioned in our report, the former Surgeon General of the United States Public Health Service noted that of the 40,000 PHS employees, about 12,000 were of a professional level. We believe that the AEC, through its direct or indirectly-funded research in the areas of biology and medicine, has access to a similarly immense manpower resource and that it is within the realm of possibility to recruit every year or two a qualified person for this job.

Another matter on which we would like your response concerns funding for Dr. Conard's work at Brookhaven. In our recommendations we suggested that the Commission allot additional funding for new or additional work which Dr. Conard feels will be beneficial for the people of Rongelap and Utiirik. We have traveled with Dr. Conard's team twice now, and although we have never heard him publicly complain for lack of funds we get the impression that the annual surveys are limited in duration and extent partly due to budgetary constraints. We have noticed that Dr. Conard is extremely careful regarding disbursement of funds and incurring expenses which can be charged to Brookhaven. Considering this, and the new development of a case of leukemia among the exposed, additional funding would enable Dr. Conard to render more completely the service he feels necessary to the people and to conduct what research he may consider valuable.

Another subject we wish to bring to your attention is the concern of the people of the two islands about the effects of radiation on the food which they consume. Since we have just recently completed a tour of the islands during which we individually interviewed about 80 persons, we feel we are in a good position to know how they feel. The feeling, almost to a man, is that they are suspicious that the local starch food and seafood they consume still contains radioactivity. Since their

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understanding of the nature of fission products deposited in the soils and waters of their homes is severely limited, this results in a situation where they worry about eating certain foods, or refuse to eat them at all. During the September 1972 survey, Dr. Conrad informed the people on Rongelap that they could now eat coconut crabs from Rongelap and Aebur Islands. Our survey revealed that nearly all of the people interviewed were still afraid to eat this item. Furthermore, some people on Rongelap still do not eat giant clams, (*Tridacna gigas*), even though they selectively concentrate the radionuclide Co^{60} which has a relatively short half-life and by now they should be quite safe to eat. Not surprisingly, the people of Utiirik also worry about this same thing, even though their estimated exposure and that of their islands was roughly one-tenth that of the Rongelapese. We are aware that Dr. Edward E. Held, formerly with the University of Washington Laboratory of Radiation and now with the Commission, has conducted radiocological surveys at Rongelap and Utiirik as recently as 1969. We would like your response to a proposed further extensive radiological survey of Rongelap and Utiirik (perhaps in conjunction with the 1974 annual examination) and a report to the people of those two islands in Marshallese to alleviate their worry about this particular matter.

Related to this matter, although beyond the scope of our mandate, we believe the Commission should take under advisement the suggestion to carry out extensive radiological surveys of the Bikini and Eniwetok Atolls prior to the resettlement of the former inhabitants. The results of the surveys could then be translated into Marshallese in layman's terms and explained to the people before their return. This might prevent misunderstandings and apprehension developing on those two atolls similar to those which have developed on Rongelap and Utiirik.

A further matter we would like to broach with the Commission is one of which we became aware during the survey this March. For the first time in 19 years it was made clear to the Rongelapese that Dr. Conrad did not work for or represent the Atomic Energy Commission. This long-standing misunderstanding of associating Dr. Conrad with the people the Rongelapese consider responsible for their original contamination and exposure has in the past burdened the good doctor with listening to complaints and requests of the people which should more properly be directed to a representative of the Commission. We would like to inquire about the possibility of having a representative of the AEC accompany either the Special Joint Committee on a future trip to the two atolls or Dr. Conrad's team next March. Specifically, Mr. W. K. Streeman of the AEC's Pacific Area Support Office in Honolulu might be the logical person to serve this function.

At present the Special Joint Committee is undertaking a study of possible additional compensation for the people of Rongelap and Utiirik for thyroidectomies, loss of earnings from inability to produce copra

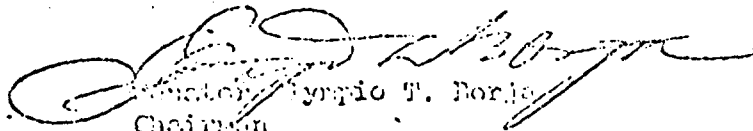
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during time of dislocation, and exposure of the land and atoll waters to radiation. We would appreciate any assistance which the Commission might be able to make available to the Committee's future requests for information or advice.

Lastly, I should note that there is a possibility that I and the Committee's staff member may be in New York during June for the meeting of the United Nations Trusteeship Council. Should that materialize, doubtless we will wish to travel to Washington to meet with a representative of the Commission to discuss more fully the concerns of mutual interest which we have brought forth in this letter.

If I or the Committee may be of any assistance to the Commission in the future, please do not hesitate to notify me. With hopes for your favorable consideration to the above proposals, I am

Sincerely yours;



Stanley T. Borja
Chairman
Special Joint Committee Concerning
Rongelap and Utirik

Enclosures (2)

cc: Stanley S. Carpenter, Dep. Ass't. Secretary for Territorial Affairs
Edward E. Johnston, High Commissioner, Trust Territory of the Pacific Islands

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