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ATOMIC ENERGY COMMISSION

Meeting No. 1267

11:30 a.m., Thursday, February 21, 1957

PRESENT:

Lewis L. Strauss
W. F. Libby
Harold S. Vance

K. E. Fields
William Mitchell

W. B. McCool

ALSO PRESENT:

James E. Ammons
John M. Bodley
Cdr. John W. Crawford
Dr. Charles L. Dunham
Gordon M. Dunning
Spofford G. English
Paul C. Fine
Edward R. Gardner
Lt. Col. H. C. Goodell
Capt. Harry Hahn
George M. Kavanagh
Bryan F. LaPlante
George G. Manov
C. L. Marshall
John L. McGruder
William L. Oakley
Col. Carey L. O'Bryan
Calvin Potts
Morse Salisbury
Lt. Col. Raymond I. Schmittke
Brig. Gen. Alfred D. Starbird
A. Tammaro
Harry S. Traynor
J. A. Waters

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- 1 -

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CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: I have expressed myself on what I think this subject is, strongly in the past, and I would like to look it over.

Item 2 is the return of the Rongelapese to their home island. Who is going to speak to that point?

MR. FIELDS: Dr. Dunham is going to speak to this point.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: Dr. Dunham, we are discussing 125/30. Would you enlighten us on it?

DR. DUNHAM: This is a problem which the Division of Biology and Medicine has had under consideration for some time, the matter of when it would be best to return the Rongelap Islanders to their home island in the atoll.

The contamination there was quite heavy several years ago. One has to weigh, in thinking of this, one, the possible hazard to the people of returning to a situation where there is a measurable degree of contamination against what is happening to the people by keeping them at Majuro on the island. The trust territory people tell me that if they are kept at Majuro much longer, they may have deteriorated in one sense to a state where they might not be able to maintain themselves on their home island.

With this general background, and again the past record of what happened to the Bikini people and the bitterness that has been caused because they never did get back

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home and never will, puts some urgency into making a decision. We have had a number of studies over the past few years in terms of the external radiation hazard to the people and this seems to be clearly minimal at the present time.

The matter of strontium 90 hazard from eating contaminated food has been evaluated, and with an adequate supplement of uncontaminated rice to their diet, it is our feeling that these people will not exceed the maximum permissible body burdens laid down by the National Committee on Radiation Protection for the population as a whole, that is, 100 Sunshine units.

COMMISSIONER VANCE: I hope we have considered that maybe these people don't want to be repatriated.

DR. DUNHAM: They did when I was out there a year ago. They wanted very much to. I have seen no evidence that they don't want to.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: I would think with the passage of time that feeling is likely to grow because they are wards now.

DR. DUNHAM: There is no question of their wanting to go back. The question that the trust territory worries about is if they hold them much longer in this state where they are literally doing nothing, just existing, being hand fed, as it were -- it is quite a rugged life they lead on those atolls, it is a question whether they would be

From WNY
1267

able to sustain their lives.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: They are attractive people. They are cleanly. It is a really nice group of folks. Have you any questions?

COMMISSIONER LIBBY: I have lived with this with the man who is providing for a number of months, and I think I have had my questions answered long since. I don't know whether you want these matters put on the record just to make the record clear.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: You should be the judge of that. If they are covered in the paper, it is not necessary.

MR. FIELDS: I think the record ought to show that there has been very extensive consideration back and forth between Commissioner Libby and the staff.

COMMISSIONER LIBBY: I might take a couple of micro-seconds on this. We have had to balance the ecology as far as strontium 90 is concerned. We had, for example, soil analysis which showed the soil to be lower in Sunshine units than the coconuts. This was obvious nonsense. We found the trouble. The soil had been analyzed incorrectly for calcium. When the proper analysis was made -- you see, the soil is nothing but limestone. The method of analysis which we first chose was to dissolve the entire limestone. This of course made too low a concentration of strontium in that part of calcium which is soluble and available to

the plant. So when we had an analysis made which determined the amounts of calcium which were soluble and available to the plant, we find the Sunshine units to be equal with the level of the coconuts and things growing on the island. So we have the total ecology as far as strontium 90 is concerned balanced. It is in total agreement with the total fallout as tested by the radiation intensity, and we find the same kind of discrimination factors operating which operate in the rest of the world, though at a much lower level elsewhere.

We find the fish comfortably low, for very good reason, of course, namely, that the ocean dilutes these things. In general, we have a feeling of certainty. However, I think after repatriation we must continue to watch them. We should take urine analysis every six months or a year in order to see how much strontium they have picked up, to be sure we are right, and I think we ought to make any further measurements on the strontium 90 contamination of the islands which seem to be called for as time goes on.

DR. DUNHAM: We are now reviewing a plan for having a continuous long time study of that atoll from a total ecological standpoint.

COMMISSIONER LIBBY: It is a rare opportunity, you see, because it bears on reactor hazards and it bears on FCDA and it bears on a host of very important things.

We will not have a piece of real estate like this as heavily contaminated we hope for our whole lives, so it is an opportunity.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: It is a good laboratory.

COMMISSIONER LIBBY: Yes.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: I think it is fine that this is on the record. My unprofessional question, Dr. Dunham, was suggested to me by a member of the staff. You and I are the only two Hongkongers here at the moment.

DR. DUNHAM: I think Dr. Dunning is, too.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: That makes three of us. I have already answered this question for myself, so I shall not tell you what the answer is, not to lead the witness. Would you be prepared to go back, both of you?

DR. DUNHAM: Yes.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: Would you, sir?

DR. DUNNING: I will answer that question by saying I have made that statement before. I would.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: I would. I am prepared to vote for this. Are you, sir?

COMMISSIONER VANCE: Yes.

COMMISSIONER LIBBY: Yes.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: It is unanimously carried.

The next paper, 764/37 and /41, intelligence information, proposal for transmission to the United Kingdom

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: Will you not interpret this for them?

GENERAL STARBIRD: No, sir, we do not interpret.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: Any objection to the approval of this paper?

COMMISSIONER VANCE: No.

COMMISSIONER LIBBY: No.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: It is unanimously approved.

I would like to say for the record in order to have a complete disclosure so that no conflict of interest will later be charged, that in respect to the return of the Bongelapese, I have a personal interest. I have a godchild three years old in that group. I probably should have abstained from voting.

MR. FIELDS: The next item is the approval of the minutes of the AEC-MLC paper.

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: I was not present at the meeting. I have no comment.

COMMISSIONER LIBBY: I have some changes. Page 5, the second line, the last word, change "radioactivity" to read "radiation".

CHAIRMAN STRAUSS: Anything else?

COMMISSIONER LIBBY: Paragraph (d), fifth line, change the last word to read "atomic weapons" instead of "thermonuclear", and at the end of the sentence "and

From my # 1267