

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

January 20, 1998

The Honorable Federico Peña
Office of the Secretary
United States Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Secretary,

We appreciate your visit to the Savannah River Site (SRS) in December. As you were able to see first hand, SRS is the preeminent site in the DOE chain with modern nuclear infrastructure, integrated waste management capabilities, and unparalleled service and safety record.

On a different, more urgent issue, we would like to express our concerns regarding the commercial light water reactor (CLWR) for the production of tritium. In doing that, we would also like to express our support for the new modular accelerator design. Recently, we have heard speculation that you may be nearing a decision on the new tritium source and that you may select the CLWR option. This causes us very serious concern.

Because the technical assessments of the CLWR have not yet been concluded, it would be premature and irresponsible to down select this technology until the technical questions surrounding it are answered. At the earliest, the decision should be withheld until the lead test assembly irradiations are completed at the Watts Bar Reactor. Furthermore, the current bid accepted by the Department would leave a critical defense need, tritium production, at the hands of the Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC). By using only one reactor, the Department exposes the tritium mission to potential shutdown by regulators in either of two ways: safety concerns about the particular reactor in use or management concerns at TVA. Furthermore TVA's engineering workforce has been scaled back which calls into question the technical expertise available to modify the reactor for tritium production. In short, there are serious technical and administrative questions to be answered concerning the current CLWR bid under consideration.

The modular accelerator has many unique characteristics which make it the better choice for the Department and the Nation. With the new modular design the cost of the accelerator has come in line with the cost of CLWR without the same regulatory and policy hurdles. The accelerator would be located at SRS where the tritium extraction facility is already located and where the employees have more than 40 years experience in safely handling tritium. The accelerator offers the nation other opportunities as well, including medical isotope production,

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Secretary Peña

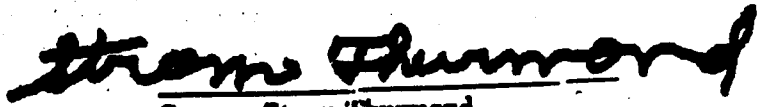
waste transmutation studies, and countless other research opportunities. Most importantly the accelerator can produce the requisite amount of tritium to meet the needs of the stockpile with the flexibility to provide tritium for any of the proposed START treaty levels.

We would encourage you not to down select a primary tritium source prematurely and look forward to working with you during the upcoming session.


Sincerely,



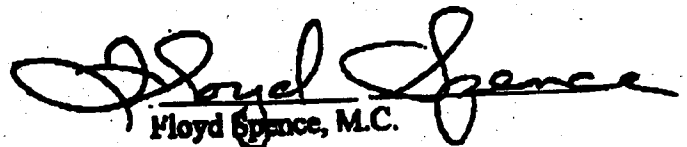
Senator Ernest Hollings



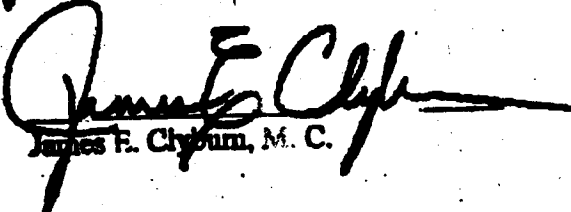
Senator Strom Thurmond



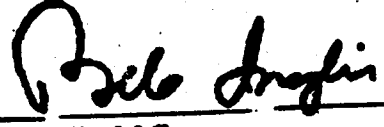
John Spratt, M.C.



Floyd Spence, M.C.



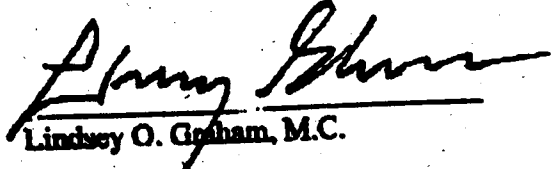
James F. Clyburn, M. C.



Bob Inglis, M.C.



Mark Sanford, M.C.



Lindsey O. Graham, M.C.