
PART VI

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION, 1989-1993

WATKINS APPOINTED SECRETARY

One sensitive appointment facing President-elect Bush was that of secretary of energy. As attention continued to focus on the Department's besieged weapons complex, reports emerged of the ongoing "fierce fight" within the Department over balancing national security with health and safety needs. In addition, the new administration and its secretary of energy faced the long-term challenge of modernizing and cleaning up weapons production sites and facilities. Transition team officials indicated that "competent management" was the most important component in choosing the new secretary. Bush said that he was looking for someone with experience in nuclear energy. By Christmas secretary of energy was the only cabinet position left unfilled. Serious consideration briefly was given to James R. Schlesinger, Carter's energy secretary, but Schlesinger's unpopularity with the oil and gas industry and doubts about his secretarial performance during the Carter years soon derailed his candidacy.¹⁵⁴

Not until January 12, 1989, the same day that the White House released the *2010 Report*, did Bush appoint Admiral James D. Watkins as secretary of energy. Former chief of naval operations until his retirement in 1986, Watkins was a nuclear engineer and had served in Rickover's nuclear-powered submarine program. His most recent role had been as chairman of the presidential AIDS commission. In announcing the appointment, the President-elect observed that both he and Watkins believed that "protecting the environment . . . is not at all inconsistent with advancing both energy security and national security needs." On energy policy, Bush noted that the Nation could not rely on one energy source, and he specifically singled out the use of nuclear power as a necessity. On the troubled weapons complex, the President-elect said that he was not committed to the *2010 Report* but he

was committed to having Watkins formulate a policy that included safety and cleanup aspects. Watkins underscored Bush's comments with his personal commitment to safety and the environment. "I am confident," he told the press, "I can help find that desired and balanced formula wherein safety is never subverted, the environment is adequately protected, and national security and other energy objectives are achieved in harmony." Restarting the production reactors, he assured his audience, would "not be done at the expense of safety."¹⁵⁵

Watkins' appointment as secretary was generally well received. The *New York Times* described Watkins as an "unusual leader" with "forceful opinions and [a] record of independence." The *Washington Post* cited his "political skill" and "competence." Bush attempted to assuage concerns in the oil and gas industry over his choice of a secretary with a nuclear power background by noting that "they got a president of the United States that came out of the oil and gas industry." Bush also nominated W. Henson Moore, former six-term congressman from Louisiana with ties to the oil and gas industry, to be deputy secretary. Less enthusiastic about Watkins' appointment was the environmental sector. A spokesperson for the Natural Resources Defense Council declared that the appointment "signals that cleaning up the bomb plants and developing a sound national energy policy will continue to be sacrificed in the name of nuclear weapons production."¹⁵⁶

SETTING PRIORITIES

At his confirmation hearing, Admiral Watkins left no doubt that his initial priority would be cleaning up the contaminated weapons complex and putting defense operations "back on track." The primary problem, according to Watkins, was in the management area. Partly this was organizational. "I'm seeing a management system that is antique, it's out of date,