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U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES
SUBCOMMITTEE ON ENERGY CONSERVATION AND POWER
OF THE
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND COMMERCE
WASHINGTON, DC 20515

704409

October 24, 1986

The Honorable John S. Herrington
Secretary
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, S.W.
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Herrington:

As you know, the Subcommittee on Energy Conservation and Power has been conducting an investigation into radiation experimentation for human subjects. I am forwarding to you the results of that investigation, a Subcommittee staff report titled, "American Nuclear Guinea Pigs: Three Decades of Radiation Experiments on U.S. Citizens."

This report reviewed Department of Energy documents, which revealed the frequent and systematic use of human subjects as guinea pigs for radiation experiments sponsored by the Department's predecessor agencies. Some of these experiments were conducted in the 1940s and 1950s, and others were performed during the supposedly more enlightened 1960s and 1970s. The report describes in detail 31 experiments during which about 695 persons were exposed.

In many of these experiments, individuals were exposed to radiation which provided little or no medical benefit to the subjects. The purpose of several of these experiments was actually to cause injury to the participants. Many others sought simply to measure the effects of radiation on humans. American citizens thus became nuclear calibration devices for experimenters run amok.

In a number of experiments, subjects received doses that exceeded presently recognized limits for occupational radiation exposure. Doses were as much as 98 times the body burden recognized at the time the experiments were conducted.

Too many of these experiments used human subjects that were captive audiences or populations that some experimenters frighteningly perhaps might have considered "expendable:" the elderly, prisoners, hospital patients suffering from terminal diseases or who might not have retained their full faculties for informed consent.

REPOSITORY DOE - FORRESTAL
COLLECTION MARKEY FILES
BOX No. 2 of 6
FOLDER HUMAN EXPERIMENTATION

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Some of the more repugnant or bizarre of these experiments include the following:

--From 1945 to 1947, as part of the Manhattan Project, 18 patients believed to have limited life spans were injected with plutonium.

--From 1961 to 1965, at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 20 elderly subjects were injected or fed radium or thorium.

--During 1946 and 1947, at the University of Rochester, six patients with good kidney function were injected with uranium salts to determine the concentration which would produce renal injury.

--From 1953 to 1957, at Massachusetts General Hospital, Boston, approximately 12 terminal brain tumor patients were injected with uranium to determine the dose at which kidney damage began to occur.

--From 1963 to 1971, 67 inmates at Oregon State Prison and 64 inmates at Washington State prison received x-rays to their testes to examine the effects of radiation on human fertility and testicular function.

--From 1963 to 1965, at the Atomic Energy Commission's National Reactor Testing Station in Idaho, radioactive iodine was purposely released on seven separate occasions. In one experiment, seven human subjects drank milk from cows which had grazed on iodine-contaminated land.

--From 1961 to 1963, at the University of Chicago and Argonne National Laboratory, 102 human subjects were fed real fallout from the Nevada Test Site; simulated fallout particles containing radioactive material; or solutions of radioactive cesium and strontium.

--During the late 1950s, at Columbia University and Montefiore Hospital, the Bronx, 12 terminal cancer patients were injected with radioactive calcium and strontium.

These experiments, and others described in the Subcommittee staff report, shock the conscience and represent a black mark on the history of nuclear medical research. They raise one major horrifying question: did the intense desire to know the consequences of radioactive exposure after the dawn of the atomic age lead American scientists to mimic the kind of demented human experiments conducted by the Nazis? Did the Department or its

predecessor agencies fund or sponsor programs which crossed the line that no scientific research can ever be permitted to traverse?

While it is clear that present public and scientific officials are generally not responsible for these experiments, these circumstances nonetheless represent a historical, institutional failure. To compound the evil, in too many experiments, no long term follow up was conducted of subjects. While these experiments cannot be undone, though they must never be repeated, there are potential remedial steps that can be taken to help the victims who served as human nuclear guinea pigs.

I therefore urge the Department of Energy to make every practicable effort to identify the persons who served as experimental subjects, to examine the long term histories of subjects for an increased incidence of radiation-associated diseases, and to compensate these unfortunate victims for suspected damages. A Defense Department program provides a model for such follow up. The Nuclear Test Personnel Review, administered by the Defense Nuclear Agency, is a registry for military personnel exposed to fallout from atmospheric nuclear tests. The primary objectives of the Review are to identify the approximately 200,000 Defense Department personnel involved in such tests, to determine their exposures, to identify incidences of death or illness, and to assist veterans in claims for compensation. → I don't think this is true.

Carl Bell
325-774

If such an effort can be carried out for military personnel acting in the line of duty, surely a similar effort should be possible for the far smaller number of peaceful atomic soldiers used as unwitting human subjects in radiation experiments. If you feel that new legislation would be necessary, the Subcommittee will be pleased to work with the Department to develop it.

If you have any questions on the material in this letter or the Subcommittee staff report, please contact John Abbotts or Larry Sidman at 202-226-2424. I look forward to receiving by November 15, 1986 a description of the Department's plans for long term follow up of these experimentally irradiated subjects, and your recommendation for what new legislation, if any, might be needed for compensation.

Sincerely,

Ed Markey

Edward J. Markey
Chairman