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Page 1 of 2

The Secretary of Energy  
Washington, DC 20585  
April 22, 1992

The Honorable Roy Romer  
Governor of Colorado  
Denver, Colorado 80203

Dear Governor Romer:

I am writing to ask for your help in overcoming continued inaction by Congress which is preventing the Department of Energy (DOE) from fulfilling its commitment to move transuranic wastes now stored in your State to the Waste Isolation Pilot Plant (WIPP).

Although these radioactive wastes can continue to be safely stored for the foreseeable future, public safety and long-term environmental protection will be enhanced through the permanent disposal of these wastes in an engineered geologic repository. The WIPP facility in New Mexico is the country's only environmentally preferred alternative to continued above ground storage of transuranic waste. Its ultimate scientific and technical feasibility has been ready since last October to be proven. The use of a limited amount of transuranic waste for experimental purposes will enable the DOE to gather the data it needs to demonstrate whether WIPP is suitable as a permanent disposal facility for transuranic wastes.

Governor Bruce King of New Mexico continues to be a strong supporter of the WIPP, the need to proceed with the test phase, and the need for early consideration of land withdrawal legislation. He is joined by Congressman Joe Skeen, in whose district the WIPP facility is located. In fact, all but one member of the New Mexico Congressional Delegation appears to support the enactment of a bill that is acceptable to the Administration.

Unfortunately, the present court-ordered injunction, coupled with the absence of an acceptable land withdrawal bill from the House, have placed the WIPP project in serious jeopardy. The DOE will be forced in the very near future to place WIPP into a standby mode, which will likely add at least 2 more years to the time needed to commence testing. Certainly, all momentum will be lost and many talented scientists and engineers may be lost also. At best, it will be very difficult to begin removing transuranic waste from current above-ground storage sites in your State. At worst, the transuranic waste now stored within your borders could remain there indefinitely.

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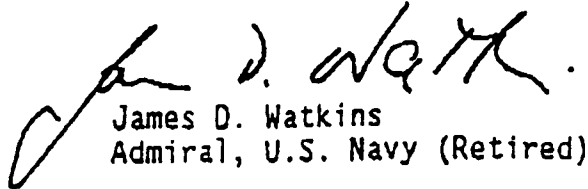
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Your help is urgently needed to resolve the impediments which are preventing DOE from moving forward with the WIPP project. It is costing the American taxpayer about \$14 million a month to keep the WIPP in its current state of readiness. Already hundreds of millions of dollars have been spent to bring this first-of-a-kind research facility to this point, and further delay may add anywhere from \$150 million to nearly \$1 billion more to this total. Congress must act soon on land withdrawal legislation.

Please help the DOE to overcome this situation, which has potential consequences for the citizens of your State, by communicating this important message in the strongest of terms to the congressional leadership and every member of your State's congressional delegation.

Sincerely,



James D. Watkins  
Admiral, U.S. Navy (Retired)

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