



Office of the President
THE MARSHALL ISLANDS

MTF

March 28, 1980

403106

Congressman Phillip Burton
2304 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C.

Congressman Sidney R. Yates
2234 Rayburn House Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C.

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Dear Congressmen Burton and Yates:

The people of the Marshall Islands deeply appreciate your efforts in securing passage of H.R. 3756 (Public Law 96-205) which commits the Government of the United States to provide to the people of each of the atolls affected by the United States nuclear weapons testing program in the northern Marshall Islands during the period 1946 to 1958 "a program of medical care and treatment and environmental monitoring for any injury, illness or condition which may be the result directly or indirectly of such nuclear weapons testing program". Once in place, the programs to be provided will meet serious and pressing medical needs of the people. However, the experience which we have had during the past year in our attempts to work with the Department of Energy and the Department of Interior to identify probable radiation - related serious medical problems affecting the people of atolls other than Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap and Utirik has led us to the belief that without direct assistance from the Congress, the existing medical problems of the people of these other atolls will remain undetected and untreated and the purposes of H.R. 3756 will not be fulfilled.

The events of the past year present an unfortunate and stark example of the cruel slowness with which the Department of Energy seems determined to proceed.

When the Government of the Marshall Islands assumed office on May 1, 1979 and assumed responsibility for many of the files of the Trust Territory Government, disturbing information was discovered in these files which indicated the occurrence of serious birth defects and other medical abnormalities of a type often connected to radiation exposure in people of atolls in the northern Marshall Islands which had been viewed by the United States as either uncontaminated



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by the radioactive fallout from the nuclear weapons testing or contaminated by such a low level of radiation as to be of no consequence. In addition, several people of these atolls had reported the occurrence of such medical problems. In a preliminary attempt to define the scope of the problems, the people of one of these atolls, Likiep, were asked to advise the Government of any such medical problems and to complete a questionnaire describing the nature of the problem. The extent of the problems identified by this initial rough effort were profoundly disturbing. Out of a population of approximately 600 Likiep people, 22 thyroidectomies were reported in addition to 18 other chronic throat disorders, 2 cases of severe birth malformations, one case of intestinal cancer and 2 cases of chronic nervousness.

In an effort to obtain more complete and accurate information on the scope of the medical problem on Likiep and the other atolls in the northern Marshalls previously considered uncontaminated, representatives of the people of Likiep and the Government of the Marshall Islands came to Washington in mid-May, 1979 to report their preliminary findings and to enlist the assistance of the Federal agencies which had been addressing the problems of Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap and Utirik. In a mid-May meeting attended by numerous officials including representatives of the Department of Energy, Interior, Defense, State, and the Defense Nuclear Agency, the Marshall Islands representatives were assured by the officials of the Departments of Energy and Interior that steps would be taken expeditiously to confirm the scope of the medical problem on the atolls of the northern Marshalls and to provide the necessary medical care.

These assurances proved to be empty promises. Ten months after the initial meetings, representatives of the Marshall Islands were invited to return to Washington to be advised of the progress which had been made. The delegation was presented not with a plan to provide medical care to the people of the northern atolls with radiation related problems nor even with a plan to conduct an analysis to ascertain the existence and scope of current medical problems that may derive from radiation exposure resulting from the nuclear testing program. Instead, the delegation



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was presented with a contract which the Department of Energy had concluded with Tabershaw Occupational Medicine Associates of Rockville, Maryland in the amount of \$58,999, excluding travel expenses, for a six month project to send statisticians to the Marshall Islands essentially to verify whether the questionnaire was a valid method of ascertaining historical information on only one form of radiation induced disease.

The Department of Energy indicated that only after this six month project was completed would the Department consider sending medical doctors to determine the scope of the existing radiation related medical problems of the people. Department officials indicated that this medical survey could take two or more years to complete, during which period the people's medical problems would remain unattended.

The delegation from the Marshall Islands was deeply disturbed by the callous unresponsiveness of the Department of Energy proposal. The delegation therefore contacted an independent medical doctor to seek preliminary recommendations regarding most productive, efficient and rapid manner to ascertain the scope of the existing medical problem in order to obtain treatment for the people in need. We were advised that although additional work would be required to design an appropriate medical survey, at a minimum, medical doctors should be sent to Likiep and the other northern atolls to scan the population with appropriate medical equipment to detect not only thyroid but also other types of cancer and abnormalities. In addition, blood tests and medical histories would need to be obtained. We were advised that surveying all 600 Likiep people likely could be completed in approximately 3 months time or less. We presented this plan outline to the Department of Energy and requested that it not proceed with its Tabershaw contract but instead utilize appropriate equipment and personnel to conduct expeditiously a full scale survey of all current radiation related medical problems. The survey, we suggested, also could be an important step towards devising the plan called for in H.R. 3756.

The Department of Energy again proved woefully unresponsive to these requests. Although offering to send a



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physician to Likiep, and to do some biochemical analysis at Likiep and a control atoll in the southern Marshalls, the Department proposed that the physician would be limited to examining the population for thyroid nodules, the most gross method of detecting thyroid problems. No willingness was expressed to scan the population with appropriate medical equipment to detect bone cancer or other potentially radiation related cancers and abnormalities. The approach proposed by the Department virtually would ignore the significant advances in cancer diagnosis which have taken place in recent years. Moreover, the proposed agreement stated that "it is clearly understood that the activities identified above are in no way related to, establish a precedent for, or influence any definition of 'affected atolls' as set forth in Public Law 96-205. The presence of thyroid pathology will not be considered as prima facie evidence of radiation causality."

Essentially, the Department again has proposed to take an extremely limited, medically backward approach which does not address the desperate needs of the people of Likiep and the other northern atolls and would frustrate the intentions of the Congress of the United States as expressed in H.R. 3756.

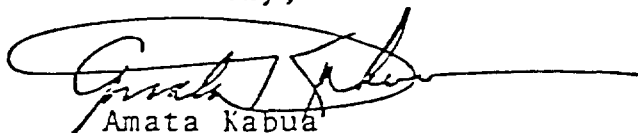
In light of the repeated unwillingness of the Department of Energy to respond in any adequate fashion to the pressing need to identify and treat the radiation related medical problems of the people of the northern Marshall Islands, the people of the Marshall Islands respectfully request that Congress appropriate to the Department of the Interior for the Government of the Marshall Islands for fiscal year 1981 \$250,000 to enable the Government of the Marshall Islands to develop and implement a full medical survey of the people of Likiep and the other northern atolls, using appropriate medical technology, medical doctors and support, to enable us to diagnose the medical problems of the people finally so that the long needed treatment can be provided on a current and ongoing basis. Although the federal administrative bureaucracy continuously has shirked its duty, we look to the United States Congress to provide the people of the northern Marshall Islands other than Bikini, Enewetak, Rongelap and Utirik the means to begin addressing the unfor-



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tunate legacy left by the nuclear weapons testing program. The information obtained in such a medical survey might also prove valuable in assessing the risks to the people of Enewetak since the cancers and other medical problems that appear to be cropping up in Likiep that was originally categorized as an uncontaminated atoll may indicate that the consequences of long term exposure to even relatively low levels of radiation are unacceptable.

Sincerely,



Amata Kabua
President