Department of Energy
Germantown, MD 20874-1290

April 18, 1997

Eugene P. Cronkite, M.D.
Medical Department
Brookhaven National Laboratory
P.O. Box 5000
Upton, NY 11973-5000

Dear Dr. Cronkite:

Thank you for taking the time to meet with us during our visit to Brookhaven National Laboratory last month and for your letter of April 14, 1997. I read with great interest the materials that both you and Dr. Robert A. Conard provided.

In responding to the request of the Marshall Islands Government and representatives of Rongelap and Utirik that the Department of Energy (DOE) initiate a competitive procurement for the future delivery of its medical program, I am very mindful of the difficulties and problems that you describe in your letter. We share the same concerns regarding the experience, qualifications and capabilities of any other organization selected to take over the program. There are many ways to address the concerns of the Marshallese about the current program regarding continuity of care, the design and delivery of the program, communication, education, and training. By competing the program, we hope to have the opportunity to explore and evaluate a wide range of ideas on how needed medical services can best be delivered.

The path that we have embarked on simply reflects our commitment to strengthen the partnership between the peoples of Rongelap and Utirik and DOE and it contractors and to the delivery of quality medical services in the most cost-effective manner.

As you know, the issue you raise concerning Ailuk and the other "mid-belt" atolls is still with us. I will be meeting with representatives from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) in 2 weeks to discuss their plans to conduct a thyroid study of these populations. Absent congressional authorization to include these atolls in our program, the CDC study would provide not only thyroid screening for these individuals, but also offer an assessment of whether the health of these populations has been adversely impacted.

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As our office works with the Marshallese to guide the medical program over the next 10 years, I recognize all of the outstanding work and devotion that you and others contributed to this program. Sometimes "reinvention" means adopting or improving practices and procedures that worked well in the past.

If you have additional thoughts on these issues, please feel free to write to me again or to call me at 301-903-5926.

Sincerely,

Paul J. Seligman, M.D., M.P.H.
Deputy Assistant Secretary
for Health Studies

cc: Frank Hawkins, DOE/EH-63
Tom Bell, DOE/EH-63
Mike Montopoli, DOE/EH-63
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