

June 15, 2004

Bill Richardson
Governor of New Mexico
Office of the Governor
State Capitol
Room 400
Santa Fe, NM 87501

Dear Governor Richardson:

We are writing to thank you for New Mexico's intervention in the license application of the proposed Louisiana Energy Services (LES) uranium enrichment plant near Hobbs, and to encourage you to stand firm against this company and its plans that would create thousands of tons of radioactive and hazardous waste with no safe disposal method.

The eyes of the environmental community across the world are on this project. As you know, LES is dominated almost entirely by the European company Urenco, which itself is a consortium composed of entities like British Nuclear Fuels, Ltd., which the U.S. Department of Energy, under your leadership, considered banning from U.S. contracts for its poor record in containing nuclear pollution.

Moreover, LES has the dubious distinction of being the only company ever to be denied an operating license for a major nuclear facility by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission. That happened, as you know, when LES tried to build an earlier version of this same plant in Louisiana, and was rewarded with a landmark verdict of environmental racism by an NRC Atomic Safety and Licensing Board.

More recently, LES attempted to locate in Tennessee, wooing local political and community leaders, exactly as they have done in New Mexico. But when those same leaders began asking basic questions of LES (e.g., Where will the waste go? How much uranium will be released into local water supplies?), honest answers were not forthcoming, and those officials put up legal roadblocks to prevent LES from operating in Tennessee.

In short, LES has a well-earned reputation for evading the truth and its responsibilities, and in attempting to place the real burden of its proposed plant—the lethal waste it would produce in huge quantities—on local citizens and governments in perpetuity.

As a global leader in the never-ending battle against nuclear proliferation, you also are surely aware of Urenco's poor record at protecting some of the most highly-guarded secrets of the atomic age: the technology behind its uranium enrichment process, which can be used not only to make reactor fuel, but also material for nuclear weapons.

Nearly every rogue nuclear country appears to have received its technology indirectly from Urenco. As you surely know, Pakistan's nuclear capability was obtained from Urenco, through the now-notorious Abdul Qadeer Khan, who obtained highly-classified Urenco blueprints. Khan

then proceeded to sell this technology across the world, apparently to Libya, North Korea, Iran, and other heretofore non-nuclear countries. In addition, as has been noted in several reputable periodicals, other Urenco contractors have made Urenco blueprints available to non-nuclear countries, such as Iraq. Urenco itself is not blameless: as late as 1989, Urenco was training Iraqi technicians in the secret art of centrifuge welding, despite the fact that at that time Iraq was supposedly a non-nuclear country with no legitimate nuclear ambitions.

Now, in 2004, with Urenco's nuclear technology spread across the globe, threatening U.S. interests and the lives of our citizens, we are to think it is appropriate to reward this company with a license to operate in New Mexico? We think not.

As a former ambassador to the United Nations, we are sure you will agree that allowing Urenco/LES to build a new uranium enrichment plant in the U.S. would undercut our nation's efforts to prevent the construction and operation of similar facilities in other countries—striking a severe blow to nuclear non-proliferation efforts for decades.

We are well aware that Urenco/LES argues that its proposed facility would mean jobs for eastern New Mexico, and jobs are important. But look at the reality. There are probably no trained uranium enrichment plant operators in eastern New Mexico. In reality, the centrifuges—the expensive, bulk part of this plant—would be built in Europe, and the construction jobs available would be short-term. The operational jobs would go primarily to existing Urenco personnel—the company has no other choice. The remaining jobs—security guards, secretaries, janitors, etc.—would go to local people, but a billion-dollar-plus project should be able to provide more than that. The actual benefit to the region and to New Mexico has to be weighed against the risks of accidents, of long-term radioactive/hazardous waste disposal, of the national priority against nuclear proliferation. And, when that weighing is complete, it is clear that LES must not be allowed to operate in New Mexico or anywhere else in the United States.

Again, we appreciate your administration's skepticism toward this project and your willingness to ask hard questions in the appropriate forum. We urge you not to back down from this stand, and indeed, to use the full powers of state government to stop LES from building in New Mexico.

Sincerely,

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