

ASC Wagon Wheel

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February 20, 1973

Dr. Dixy Lee Ray, Chairman
U. S. Atomic Energy Commission
Washington, D. C. 20545

Dear Dr. Ray:

May I offer my somewhat belated congratulations on your appointment as Chairman of the Atomic Energy Commission. Quite clearly, your famous energy, your reputation for innovation and your concern for the many ramifications of the task before you will be put to tests not only large but unknown. I am sure you will meet those tests with great success. Please know that I am prepared to give assistance with your new tasks.

Inherent in your new responsibilities as Chairman is, I believe, the need to direct the Commission in achieving important advances in energy development. There can be no question that the atom will play a significant role in alleviating the search for a safe and substantial source of energy. To this end, the Commission's work should be encouraged and supported by the Congress.

However, it is my view--and I am sure you will agree--that also inherent in the Commission's development work is the vital requirement to demonstrate unequivocally to the public that its programs are necessary, safe and well thought out. I judge that this has not been the case with the Plowshare Program, especially as it relates to nuclear stimulation of natural gas and, in particular, Project Wagon Wheel.

Part of the legacy you have inherited from your predecessor, Dr. Ray, is what must be judged a poor demonstration of goodwill and integrity by the Atomic Energy Commission in communicating to the citizens of Sublette County, Wyoming what function local opinion of Project Wagon Wheel will have in the decision to continue with the project.

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It is the sustaining belief of responsible citizens in Sublette County that former-Chairman Schlesinger, on more than one occasion, assured them that if overwhelming local opposition could be demonstrated, Project Wagon Wheel would be terminated. As I am sure you know, it was from this understanding that a grass roots citizen group conducted a "straw vote" coincident to the last general election on the approval or disapproval of the project. In a vote representing 78 per cent of the county's population, by a margin of almost four to one, voters voiced their opposition to the project--an unquestionable vote of opposition.

When a delegation of citizens from the area recently came to Washington carrying this local mandate of opposition, they were following what they believed to be a justified, orderly and necessary means of redress. In part, I am sure, because of the transition of leadership at the Atomic Energy Commission; and, in part, because of a wide range of interpretations of just what former-Chairman Schlesinger meant in his public statements recognizing the important power of local opinion, these citizens were unable to find a satisfactory recognition of their petition.

It is not my intention to continue the debate over what your predecessor was trying to communicate in his statements about citizen participation. Nevertheless, I pose again the question of what role overwhelming local opposition will play in the final decision making on Wagon Wheel?

It seems to me that the Atomic Energy Commission, prior to your assumption of leadership, has taken an altogether arbitrary position on this matter. Why, for example, was the Governor of Colorado allowed to have veto power of the Rio Blanco test, a privilege not thus far extended to the State of Wyoming in the case of Wagon Wheel?

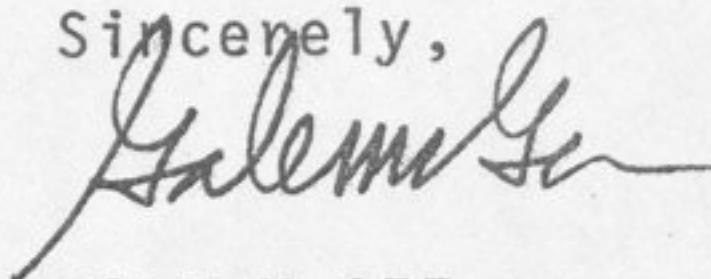
What value, I ask, does the Commission place on the stable and sensitive way of life of citizens in one of the most sparsely populated counties in one of the most sparsely populated states of the union? Must policy decisions be either so remote from citizen participation or dependent on pure economics as to constitute a clear perversion of the public interest?

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The dumping of pollutants into our waterways--or into our air sheds--has been done and continues today because it is "economic" for industries, municipalities and even citizens to do so. But nevertheless, the economic justification has failed. It has become increasingly obvious that we have saved little by postponing the costs of inefficiency and cleanup.

My commitment to assure that the people of Sublette County are afforded a reasonable and rightful role in controlling the fate of their way of life cannot be too strongly emphasized. The effort and goodwill demonstrated by these citizens in assessing the Atomic Energy Commission's program in a democratic and orderly way is deserving of better consideration. I am sure you agree.

Sincerely,



GALE McGEE
United States Senator

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