

STATEMENT OF HONORABLE JOHN E. FOGARTY, U. S.
REPRESENTATIVE OF THE SECOND CONGRESSIONAL
DISTRICT OF RHODE ISLAND BEFORE THE SUBCOMMITTEE
ON RADIATION OF THE JOINT ATOMIC ENERGY COMMITTEE
ON WEDNESDAY, JULY 29, 1959

Mr. Chairman and members of the Committee:

I appreciate your courtesy in permitting me to present my views on the proposal to dump radioactive waste in waters adjacent to the shores of my State of Rhode Island.

Following the report of the Committee on Oceanography of the National Academy of Sciences and its attendant publicity, a veritable barrage of opposed public opinion developed in my State. This despite the fact that the Academy stated as its opinion, and spelled out in some detail, that the material was low intensity waste and that no possible harm could come from such dumping. The nub of the matter is, however, that our people have been so subjected to conflicting statements, and at times actual misstatements on the problem of radioactive danger and atomic fallout over the past few years, that they have become conditioned

to look with suspicion on any statement on the subject. And rightly so.

With regard to atomic fallout alone, the contrary claims, charges and counter charges are frightening. Just last week the Public Health Service reported that its experts had found that the Animas River in Colorado and New Mexico, below a uranium refinery, contained samples as high as 160% above the maximum safe level for health. And this river is used as a source of supply for the homes of 30,000 people. The Public Health Service also found that vegetables grown by irrigation from this water contained not only radium but also surprising amounts of strontium 90 which could have only come from nuclear-test fallout. Samples of these vegetables contained readings of up to twelve times the maximum permissible level set by the Atomic Energy Commission. This is but one of many examples which the American people read about after previously being assured that no health problem exists.

It is incidents such as this, after previous assurances of safety and complete control, that cause our people to wonder as to just how much credence can be placed on the public pronouncements we receive with such regularity. It is interesting to note that there has been one element of consistency in testimony by scientific groups. Generally speaking, scientists working for or in connection with the Atomic Energy Commission have tended to minimize fallout and radiation danger. On the other hand, civilian scientists and scientific groups not associated with the AEC have repeatedly sounded the alarm.

My own observation is that the Atomic Energy Commission has a regrettable record of equivocation in setting forth the health hazards of nuclear radiation. It has withheld information for months. We have reason to believe that some of the facts might never have been publicized had it had its own way. It is particularly disturbing to realize that vital information affecting the health of our own families may at this very moment be denied us. Much of the information we have been given is the result of the

labors of your Joint Committee on Atomic Energy, Mr. Chairman, and not at the initiative of the Atomic Energy Commission itself.

It was because of these factors, so well typified by the present problem, that I introduced my bill, H.R. 7014, in this session of Congress. The bill provides for the vesting of primary responsibility for the protection of the public health and safety from radiation hazards in the U. S. Public Health Service. At the time of introduction I stated: "There has been entirely too much confusion and contradiction in the evidence that has been presented both to the Congress and to the American public with respect to the dangers inherent in the radiation hazard problem. That problem, as I see it, is one of health. Logically, it should rest with that agency of government charged with the fostering and the protection of the nation's health -- the Public Health Service."

Since that time my conviction has been strengthened. I know that the people of Rhode Island

would rest much easier if they knew that the U. S. Public Health Service was controlling the present proposal for the dumping of radioactive waste off our shores.

Certain things we know. The growing application of atomic energy has resulted in the production of radioactive waste materials which must be safely and practically disposed of by storage, discharge to liquid waste handling systems, incinerations, burial on land or by dumping in the sea. Recommendations have been suggested that disposal of such material to the oceans be predicated upon separation of the waste from the ocean environment by a container of suitable integrity. However, present knowledge of the behavior of these containers does not provide sufficient assurance of their integrity. This raises the question of the extent of contamination released to the marine environment in the disposal area and the path of the released radioactivity through the marine food chain to man.

Valid answers to these questions require field measurements of released radioactivity in the disposal sites, determination at points of human exposure of the extent of the concentration of radioisotopes through the marine cycle, local ocean usage (food, recreation, etc.) and integration of the experimental results to yield meaningful "permissible" concentrations of significant radioisotopes in oceanwaters and waste disposal rates in the particular areas. To date available information has limited applicability to the above factors. Few if any field measurements have been made in the ocean disposal areas currently in use. Studies of marine life and their radioisotope concentration capabilities are incomplete. The required compilation and analysis of experimental information by competent health authorities has not been done due to lack of data.

Within this general evaluation, it is important that health agencies maintain surveillance of the waste disposal practices within their jurisdiction and that State and Federal agencies conduct

appropriate studies of the environment at the ocean disposal sites. Concurrently health agencies should maintain surveillance and control of radioactivity resulting from ocean disposal practice affecting human exposure directly or indirectly. And over all should be the operation of the U. S. Public Health Agency charged with the responsibility of protecting the health of the nation from all radiation hazards.

Seacoast states in particular have a real interest in knowing that the radioactive materials from time of use to ocean disposal are handled in such manner that return via the marine food chain or directly to the environment of man in his recreational waters is not significant from the standpoint of public health. I submit that the best method to assure this would be to vest protective responsibility in our Public Health Service. This committee could aid in gaining that objective immeasurably by adding its strong recommendation for the immediate passage of the type of legislation which I have described.

Mr. Chairman, I would like to include in my testimony two editorials from the Providence Sunday Journal of July 19, 1959 and the Providence Journal

of July 24, 1959. I think that they give an excellent background on the impact of the problem on the people of my state. I would also like to include telegrams which I have received from William P. Lewis, Rhode Island State Senator from Block Island, Rhode Island and from Harvey S. Reynolds, Rhode Island Senator from Little Compton, Rhode Island. In addition I submit a letter received from Howard L. Bell of 244 Pleasant Street, Rumford, Rhode Island.