



The University of Georgia

Office of the President

June 15, 2007

The Honorable Samuel W. Bodman
U.S. Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Avenue, Southwest
Washington, D.C. 20585

Dear Secretary Bodman:

The University of Georgia and its Savannah River Ecology Laboratory have enjoyed a long and productive relationship with the Department of Energy and its federal predecessor organizations at the Savannah River Site. This special relationship has helped to generate a historical body of databases of ecological research; provide invaluable outreach, education and service; and, perhaps most crucially, ensure public confidence in the safety of SRS operations. We regret that this special relationship has been altered in such a major way.

We understand that the Department of Energy and its Environmental Management Division (EM) are under tremendous financial pressure, and that the EM budget has been slashed from \$400 million to \$20 million in recent years. Therefore, we understand the pressures that have led DOE-EM, which must give priority to environmental cleanup, to redefine its relationship with the Savannah River Ecology Laboratory and to insist on being viewed as a "customer."

I appreciate your concern that our staff over the past 24 months could have responded more favorably than they have to DOE's requests for more specific, project-based funding. However, I do not think they can be faulted for taking seriously written and verbal assurances from Energy Department staff in February and March 2006 that SREL would receive \$4 million in funding for fiscal year 2007. Neither we at UGA nor staff at SREL were aware that both Mr. Jeffrey M. Allison, manager of the Savannah River Site office, and DOE's Aiken contracting officer did not have the authority to issue such commitments.

The practical result of this new reality is the withdrawal by DOE of the longstanding core laboratory infrastructure support essential for SREL to function as a viable and vibrant entity distant from the main campus in Athens. Unfortunately, UGA, which also faces significant budgetary pressures and the need to meet instructional,

research, and service priorities, is unable to replace the financial support that DOE has withdrawn. Thus, we must begin reducing significantly the core laboratory facilities.

First, the university has had to take the very difficult step of sending termination letters to approximately 40 employees, most of whom will be given priority for appropriate openings as they become available on the Athens campus. The university is absorbing approximately \$338,000 in unpaid accrued leave and other support for SREL employees. Approximately half of the staff will be terminated as of June 30, 2007, and the remainder will be charged with completing work on the active grants and contracts at the laboratory, as well as carrying out various duties required for reduced operations at the facility. Defaulting on active work at SREL would force the university to repay over \$3.2 million to granting agencies.

Due to the 56-year history of the laboratory and the complexity of reducing operations, we expect to have approximately 40 employees on-site (with a UGA salary commitment of over \$900,000) for all or part of the next calendar year. In addition, in fiscal 2007-08, the university will continue to fund tenure and tenure-track faculty (\$654,554) and graduate students (\$390,134) to complete contractual research at SREL.

Second, you had expressed some concern about leadership at SREL. Dr. Paul M. Bertsch, director of the laboratory, has resigned as director effective June 15, 2007. While we considered this move necessary to facilitate our continued cooperation with DOE, I do not believe Dr. Bertsch, a distinguished research scientist himself, should be faulted for taking positions he believed to be in the best interests and in support of his staff and the laboratory. Dr. Carl Bergmann and Dr. Carl Strojan will serve as interim co-directors of SREL as we initiate reductions in operations at the laboratory facility. Dr. Bergmann will have authority to act on behalf of the University of Georgia.

Third, the six faculty members at SREL will transfer their primary activities to the Athens campus, although we expect research (funded by DOE and other entities) involving Georgia faculty, students, and support personnel to continue at SRS field sites for the remaining life of the 2006-2011 Cooperative Agreement. We trust that DOE will ensure access of such personnel to the Savannah River Site during this period, and we further hope that DOE will honor the long and special relationship with UGA—as well as the body of work that has resulted from it—by considering future access to SRS field sites beyond the term of the current agreement, pending appropriate negotiations.

As noted earlier, the university will fulfill its obligations for existing grants. Moreover, because of our demonstrated expertise, which has been recognized internationally, we will continue to apply for additional grants that would utilize the Savannah River Site. We want to have a positive working relationship with the Department of Energy.

You have indicated a desire on the part of the Department of Energy to change the focus of the laboratory from one of evaluating long-term ecological changes resulting


from activities at SRS to one of developing methods for soil and water remediation at contaminated sites. Unfortunately, we do not have sufficient expertise on-site currently to conduct research of this nature. However, we want to continue the discussion about opportunities that exist at SREL, and we are willing, if you desire, to sit down with the Department of Energy to determine if a mutual interest exists to develop this expertise jointly at the Savannah River Site.

The uncertainty surrounding the future of SREL has inevitably created a great deal of understandable public concern that has been directed towards both DOE and the University. This outcry in part reflects the value many place in the work being conducted by SREL and the confidence they derive from it. While understanding and appreciating these sentiments, the University of Georgia now looks to the future and a productive relationship with the Department of Energy around a wide variety of mutual interests, from soil and groundwater remediation to alternate forms of energy. As the nation's first state-chartered university and a land-grant institution, UGA has a large and diverse faculty with a broad range of talents that can be harnessed for mutual benefit to address DOE's mission and national priorities.

I regret that it took as long as it did for the issue to reach our level. Perhaps you share my belief that these issues could have been resolved at the staff level, as they have been repeatedly over the past five years. While I think that the public and political protests over issues at SREL could have been seen as troubling, this is a natural part of the governmental process, and citizens and the Department have been well-served by the interest and active involvement by members of Congress in recent years, particularly Senators Chambliss and Isakson.

It is unusual and perhaps unprecedented for any one university to have a 56-year relationship with a federal agency, and I am truly sorry that this partnership has been reduced so significantly. Nonetheless, we at the University of Georgia look forward to many more opportunities to work with the U.S. Department of Energy on projects that contribute to human knowledge and national priorities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Michael F. Adams", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Michael F. Adams
President

MFA/maa

cc: Chancellor Erroll B. Davis, Jr.