Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

February 13, 2001

Faculty Senate Representatives
Professor Robert C. Cooke
Dean of the Faculty
Cornell University
410 Thurston Avenue
Ithaca, New York 14853

Dear Faculty Senate Representative:

The past several years, especially the past year, have seen momentous changes in the support for nuclear engineering education. Several recent reports focusing upon the U.S. and international situation recognized the increased need for nuclear trained engineers and the importance of university research reactors.

The Department's Nuclear Energy Research Advisory Committee (NERAC) has addressed the issue of university research reactors and recently established a three-person panel of experts to collect and assess information on all university reactors including their research and training capabilities and operating costs. The panel will use this information over the next two months to help the Department formulate a strategy to support the maintenance of vital university research reactor facilities in the United States. We expect to announce the details of this strategy in late March or early April.

In the interim, we hope that universities with research reactors contemplating decommissioning will delay any decisions until such time. The U.S. Department of Energy believes that the Nation's university research and teaching reactors are a unique and irreplaceable element in the U.S. science, engineering, and educational infrastructure. Cornell's Ward Center for Nuclear Sciences is a prime example of these vital facilities. Because, in our opinion, Ward Center has many compelling features that give it a competitive advantage. We expect Cornell can successfully compete for significant new funding over the next few years.

These factors have served the University well. In our letter of November 1, 2000, to Cornell's Local Advisory Council, we summarized the Department's financial support for the Ward Center:

- Funding to Cornell's Ward Center has increased from $3,000 in 1997-1998 to over $620,000 in 2000-2001.

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- Cornell's most recent award is the three-year commitment of the Electric Power Research Institute's grant of $180,000 to match the $180,000 grant provided by the Department. This award, which represents the maximum grant that currently can be awarded under the Department of Energy/Industry Matching Grants Program, is available only to schools with nuclear engineering programs.

- Cornell also received a Department Nuclear Engineering Education Research (NEER) grant of almost $200,000 for the years 2000-01. The NEER awards are very competitive (*e.g.*, fiscal year 2000; 13 grants were awarded out of 118 proposals) and limited to universities with a nuclear engineering program and/or a research reactor used for the proposed research.

- Cornell has also been the recipient of Department funding through our Reactor Sharing Program ($30,000 for the past two years), Reactor Instrumentation Upgrades (over $67,000 the past two years), and Fuel Assistance Program ($350,000 in fiscal year 1999).

The U.S. Congress is now considering a bipartisan, bicameral bill, "Department of Energy University Nuclear Science and Engineering Act," in support of the Nation's university research and teaching reactor facilities and nuclear engineering programs. The Senate version is an authorization bill which anticipates more than $200 million in support to University nuclear programs over the next five years.

Judging from the Ward Center's past performance and recent initiatives, we fully expect Cornell to be successful in securing funds to increase undergraduate and graduate educational benefits and to add more capabilities that will make the Ward Center more attractive to Cornell researchers. Without such a facility, Cornell would find it difficult to compete for this new funding.

We therefore encourage you to avoid a final decision on the future of the Ward Center reactor until the Department has had an opportunity to announce its new strategy to support U.S. university research reactors. If you require additional information, please do not hesitate to contact us.

Sincerely,

William D. Magwood, IV, Director
Office of Nuclear Energy, Science
and Technology