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Congress of the United States House of Representatives

June 17, 2009

The Honorable Steven Chu
Secretary of Energy
U.S. Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave., SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Secretary Chu:

We are writing to express our strong support for the continuation of the Department of Energy's (DOE) Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository program and its related Nuclear Regulatory Commission (NRC) licensing review.

There are 121 sites in 39 states around the country where there is presently stored spent nuclear fuel and high-level waste. Many of these sites are DOE Environmental Management (EM) cleanup sites, such as Hanford, Savannah River, Oak Ridge, and Idaho, where DOE has an obligation to clean up and dispose of the legacy waste generated from the U.S. nuclear weapons program.

Without a viable repository program to provide a reliable means of disposition, DOE spent fuel and high-level waste will become stranded, and the sites themselves will become de facto repositories.

The House Appropriations Committee report accompanying the Energy and Water Appropriations bill for Fiscal Year 2009 bill stated that the final disposition plan for all of DOE's current and future inventory of defense-related spent fuel and high-level waste depends entirely on the timely licensing and operation of the Yucca Mountain repository.

Yucca Mountain is the linchpin for the Department's entire spent fuel strategy. If Yucca does not open on schedule, or if its capacity cannot be expanded, or if a reliable source of funding is not secured, then the other elements of DOE's spent fuel strategy will collapse.

Currently, there is no "Plan B" for the disposition of DOE's inventory of spent fuel and high-level waste accumulating at DOE EM cleanup sites. The proposed Blue Ribbon Commission to study options to Yucca Mountain is unlikely to find a "silver bullet solution," since we already have over 50 studies by prestigious institutions, like the National Academy of Sciences, and Yucca still remains a suitable repository site. Any attempt to find a new repository site would likely take an additional 20 years and upwards of \$15 billion to develop.

Accordingly, we support increased funding for the Yucca Mountain project to a level that adequately, not "minimally" as the Administration has proposed, keeps the licensing review of Yucca Mountain on track. Inadequate funding is certain to have an adverse impact on the scheduled startup date of the Yucca Mountain repository and hence likely to:

- Jeopardize timely responses to the NRC's requests for additional information as a result of the Commission's ongoing review of the DOE Yucca Mountain license application;
- Jeopardize timely responses to filed contentions as part of the preparation of NRC's public hearing process;
- Delay the timely removal and final disposition, as well as increase costs, of defense spent fuel and high-level waste from DOE cleanup programs, including Hanford, Idaho, Oak Ridge, and Savannah River. Such delays are almost certain to cause DOE to be in non-compliance with its commitments under Tri-Party Agreements and consent orders with the states in which this DOE defense waste is located; and
- Disrupt the U.S. Navy spent nuclear fuel defueling and storage plans, and impact planned shipments of Navy fuel from Idaho to Yucca Mountain in accordance with the Idaho Batt agreement.

In order to avoid further delays and to provide the expeditious removal of DOE defense waste compliant with court-stipulated agreements, we strongly support additional funding of the Yucca Mountain nuclear waste repository. The Yucca Mountain repository is an important national asset that is needed for disposal of the defense waste generated as part of our nuclear weapons program.


Sincerely,


Doc Hastings
Member of Congress

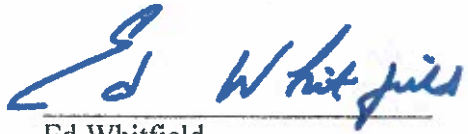

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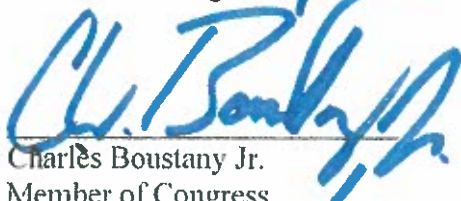
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