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Politics over Policy

Along with a number of other organizations, the Nuclear Waste Strategy Coalition (NWSC) cosigned a letter to Secretary of Energy Chu expressing significant concern about the federal government's actions related to the planned geologic repository at Yucca Mountain, NV. The NWSC has particular concern that the proposed Blue Ribbon Commission (BRC) to study waste management strategies might be organized as a Presidential Panel rather than the preferred process under the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA). Under FACA, the BRC will be more likely to provide an unbiased, impartial, fair and comprehensive alternative evaluation to the President, Congress and the stakeholders for the management and disposal of spent nuclear fuel (SNF) and high-level radioactive waste (HLRW) currently stranded at 121 sites in 39 states.

We are also concerned by Senator Harry Reid's July 31 statement that the President and Energy Secretary Steven Chu agree with his position to cut off all funding for the continued review of the license application by the Nuclear Regulatory Commission in the Administration's fiscal year (FY) 2011 budget request.

Abandoning the pending license application, as well as more than 40 years of scientific investigations and \$10 billion of ratepayer funding toward the development of a national repository, would terminate 700 jobs, would evaporate decades of scientific and technological knowledge, and would be a contradiction to Congresses' directive to the Department of Energy (DOE) to submit the licensing application through the 1982 Nuclear Waste Policy Act, as amended (NWPA). Abandoning the pending license application would also contradict the President's Memorandum on Scientific Integrity issued in March 2009 stating that "political officials should not suppress or alter scientific or technological findings and conclusions."

Therefore, we urge the DOE Secretary to request sufficient funds from the Nuclear Waste Fund in its FY 2011 budget to allow the license application to proceed in a timely manner while the BRC is reviewing the future management of the nation's nuclear waste disposal program.

The NWSC further urges the Secretary to form the BRC under FACA with a Commission composed of credible experts with relevant technical expertise in the field, beyond reproach. The process should be open to the public participation and should result in a clearly identified mechanism for the federal government to fulfill its statutory and contractual obligation to remove SNF and HLRW from 121 sites in 39 states. Following FACA will help ensure a transparent, credible process in which all stakeholders are represented appropriately.

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The NWSC is an ad hoc group of state utility regulators, state attorneys general, electric utilities and associate members representing 47 member/affiliate organizations in 31 states, committed to reforming and adequately funding the U.S. civilian high-level nuclear waste transportation, storage, and disposal program.