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MR. MCKEEL: My name is Daniel McKeel. I am a licensed Missouri physician, a medical scientist and
1 a faculty pathologist located at Washington University School of Medicine here in St. Louis. Even though the Yucca Mountain Environmental Impact Statement took five years to produce the draft, I still have some serious concerns that convince me that the period for public debate on the merits of the transportation plan should be extended from its current February the 9th by at least another six to 12 months. How else can citizens intelligently read, understand and react to a 1,600 page highly technical document like the Yucca Mountain EIS? What is the rush to make a final decision?

If we make miscalculations or the scientific data is flawed or the plans for protecting the public's safety are inadequate, the risks and consequences are enormous because of the nature of the radioactive material which could cause harm to people and the environment for hundreds and even thousands of years in the future. The current radioactivity remediation efforts here in St. Louis could soon seem like child's play if any of these unpredictable but foreseeable circumstances should actually occur.

2 Why am I so worried otherwise? First, I worry about some of the basic scientific assumptions implicit in the Yucca Mountain EIS, specifically many assumptions are based on the DOE and NRC being able to predict and plan for what will occur 10,000 years down the road. No, I didn't make a mistake -- I wish I had. The figure used repeatedly is 10,000 years, not days or months. To me, this is absurd rationalization. Suppose, for example, Yucca Mountain incurred a direct nuclear bomb attack and the stockpile was damaged or became unstable. How would that affect the carefully constructed 10,000 year timetable? We are assured the Yucca Mountain waste containers are invulnerable. However, there is abundant evidence of leakage from the current repository casks at nuclear power and weapons plants. Why hasn't this same degree of proposed engineering safety been built into existing facilities? After all, haven't the NRC and DOE been safeguarding us all along?

3 Which leads me to a second concern, that of possible misinformation. I am a co-author of a new brochure that alerts the general public for the first time to the potential medical hazards of routine, planned radioactivity releases into the air and water that occur daily at all 103 nuclear plants. That releases such as this do, in fact, occur used to be documented by the NRC in their publication put out yearly, NUREG-2907. Unfortunately, this very valuable informational document which brought together in one place information about routine and accidental releases and waste shipments that we have talked about tonight at all nuclear power plants was discontinued for budgetary reasons in 1995.

What key medical information about the Yucca Mountain nuclear repository have we not been told? Will public information be withheld invoking similar budgetary constraints? After all, I assume the public will foot the bill even though commercial nuclear power plants will contribute 90 percent of the wastes. Why did the public utilities not plan for this easily foreseeable waste buildup and why did they not budget to cover it? This does not inspire public confidence in cost estimates for the present monumental plan.

4 Third, I am concerned in general about the lack of DOE's solicitation of input from the academic medical community on medical safety issues regarding the overall Yucca Mountain plan. In particular, I worry about the potential adverse health effects on people who must load, unload and move the high-level radioactive waste across the country, and I worry especially about the people who inhabit the towns and cities like St. Louis, Missouri and Belleville and East St. Louis, Illinois where the railroads pass and derailments are well known and common occurrences.

5 We need a lot more information on nuclear transport accidents that have occurred in the 2,500 "successful" shipments of similar high-level radioactive wastes that I have read have already taken place in the U.S. Where can I get this information? Will it be available to the public if the effort to upload

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6 Yucca Mountain with mega-rads goes into effect? One thing the EIS statement definitely asserts is that storage containers do degrade, and there is a measurable risk to the public.

7 Fourth, I am concerned about the preparedness of the local hospitals and emergency medical systems to handle radiation exposures at all. This is not a subject which receives much attention and most of us doctors, nurses and allied health personnel never see a case or receive any specific training what to do in case of a nuclear disaster. Good intentions here are not sufficient to fully protect the public.

8 Thank you for providing this forum for citizens like me to express our concerns. I urge the decision makers to extend the period for considering the plan by the public and the scientific and medical communities. Give us time to search for alternatives including letting the wastes remain on site, which could make good economic sense as well. Let the economists weigh in on this 30 year long transportation plan, re the costs and benefits. In short, we need more time to have any chance of reaching a consensus on the best implementation plan to follow. Clearly the DOE and NRC do not have all the answers or else none of us would be here tonight, we would all be at home relishing the thought of a Rams victory next weekend. Thank you very much.