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Chandler L. van Orman
3312 Woodley Road, NW
Washington, DC 20008

September 24, 2001

The Honorable Spencer Abraham
Secretary of Energy
Department of Energy
1000 Independence Ave. SW
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Mr. Secretary,

The Department of Energy (DOE) reached a major milestone in its mission to develop an underground disposal facility for commercial used nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste when it issued, on August 21, its preliminary site suitability evaluation (PSSE.) This document is the culmination of nearly two decades of scientific and environmental study. It provides an irrefutable scientific foundation for your decision to recommend Yucca Mountain as a repository site.

The PSSE, as you know, fulfills a specific requirement of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act for DOE to provide scientific information on those issues being considered prior to recommending a repository site.

The following are several key points covered in the PSSE.

- About 20 years of in-depth scientific investigation has examined every environmental facet of Yucca Mountain, from hydrology to geology to seismology and more.
- The Energy Department and its teams of scientists from the national laboratories and the U.S. Geological Survey have found no evidence to disqualify Yucca Mountain as a site for a permanent repository.
- Research has been continually reviewed by regulatory, advisory and scientific peer groups such as the Nuclear Regulatory Commission, the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board, the Advisory Committee on Nuclear Waste, and the U.S. Geological Survey.
- Earlier reports—including those from the National Academy of Sciences and the Energy Department's draft environmental impact statement—have demonstrated that development of a repository is the safest and most economical way to dispose of used fuel rods from commercial nuclear power plants and radioactive waste from the nation's defense activities.

- The draft environmental impact statement showed that transportation can be safely conducted and is a much better option than continuing to store used fuel at more than 70 sites around the country. The outstanding record of safety spanning nearly 3,000 shipments of used fuel since the mid-1960s strengthens this approach.
- Consumers have committed about \$17 billion solely for the federal government's nuclear waste management program and the program, already 12 years behind schedule, cannot be delayed further.
- There is a consensus of support among policymakers, and beyond, for progress in the federal government's nuclear waste management program. This includes positions taken by the Bush Administration, the National Governors Association, and bipartisan majorities in Congress. State utility commissioners, taxpayer watchdogs, and Wall Street analysts also are among the wide range of interests urging federal action.
- Scientists and government leaders are investigating recycling of used nuclear fuel and other advanced methods to treat radioactive waste. This research should continue. But even with these advancements, there is still a need for a repository for the radioactive byproducts of these processes.

Your issuance of the PSSE was the right thing to do. It is imperative that the program to designate Yucca Mountain as the permanent repository be kept on track. You must make such a recommendation to the President.

With best personal regards.

Sincerely,



Chandler L. van Orman