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PUBLIC STATEMENT OF JOHN McCLURE

MR. McCLURE: Good afternoon. Welcome to Nebraska. My name is John McClure. I'm vice president of strategic planning and governmental affairs for Nebraska Public Power District.

Nebraska Public Power District owns and operates Cooper Nuclear Station, which has over 25 years of operating experience. This year -- or last year in 1999, we set a record for generation out of that facility. We expect it to be viable well into the future.

In addition today, I'm making comments on behalf of the Omaha Public Power District which owns and operates Fort Calhoun, a nuclear plant south of Blair, Nebraska, which has also been operating for over 25 years in the state.

The electric consumers who benefit from the energy produced by those two plants have contributed over \$180 million to help advance the development of permanent disposal capacity for spent nuclear fuel as part of a national program where electric consumers have committed funds of approximately \$16 billion to make this program work. In Nebraska, as well as nationally, approximately one-fifth of our energy comes from nuclear power plants.

I've been experienced with this project since the early 1980s when the original federal legislation was passed. And at the time I was serving as an attorney at Nebraska Public Power. I was involved in the contract we signed in 1983 indicating that we would have disposal capacity available by January 31, 1998, and that DOE would begin taking the waste.

We are frustrated by the pace of the development of this program and hope that we can now with this DEIS move forward because of our belief that the preliminary analysis in the DEIS does support development of Yucca Mountain.

I'd like to focus my comments today on the transportation aspect of this issue which seems to be an important issue for the audience here today since Nebraska would likely be a significant corridor state in the event that the Yucca Mountain project moves forward -- an event that we would definitely like to see.

1... I'd like to speak generally with respect to transportation of spent nuclear fuel and then specifically. Because NPPD, in the 1980s, was involved in an approximately five-year shipping campaign, moving spent nuclear fuel from Cooper Nuclear Station by rail through Lincoln, through Plattsmouth, across Iowa, and on into a storage facility at Morris, Illinois. And I think we learned some valuable lessons from that experience.

2... First and foremost, shipping spent nuclear fuel has a proven track record of being a safe activity. And there are a number of reasons why it is safe. First of all, we have rigorous standards and regulatory oversight. It all begins with the shipping container. Unlike other materials that are transported on a regular basis, nothing is transported in the type of massive container which has been designed to withstand extreme accident conditions.

There have been some comments earlier about some of the previous testing or -- and concerns about maybe in the future has everything been fully tested. But let me emphasize again the rigors with which the current generation of casks are designed, some of the actual testing that has been done, because I think it's important to keep all of this in mind.

...2 There have been demonstrations taking casks and crashing them into a 700-ton concrete barrier backed with 1,700 tons of earth. That was done at 60 miles an hour. There was minimal damage to the cask. It was put on another vehicle and crashed at 80 miles an hour. And, again, it had minimal damage and met all the design criteria.

A cask has been impacted at 80 miles an hour by a 120-ton locomotive; again, with minimal damage. The point is: These containers have been designed with considerable conservatism to meet severe accident conditions and maintain integrity.

...1 Let's look at the stellar safety record of shipping spent nuclear fuel. Over the last several decades, we have over 3,000 shipments that have taken place without any sort of a nuclear incident. We have over 700 shipments of submarine fuel that have also taken place in that time frame.

But, again, let me come back to a personal experience that I had in the 1980s. From 1984 until early 1989, Nebraska Public Power shipped 1,056 spent nuclear fuel assemblies by rail from Cooper Nuclear Station to Morris, Illinois.

I'm going to talk about three fundamental lessons that we either learned or confirmed in that experience. First and foremost, spent nuclear fuel can be shipped safely and fully protect the public health and safety. That was lesson number one. Not that we learned it, we simply confirmed it.

3... The second one is that there do need to be significant efforts undertaken by shippers to prepare the carriers and work crew, to prepare state and local officials, and to prepare emergency responders to understand not only the nature of the shipments, but the performance of the containers, the capabilities and responsibilities of the various parties involved in this process.

A third and related lesson we learned is that you have to be prepared to address legitimate state and local needs pertaining to routing concerns and training of personnel, and especially emergency response personnel.

If I can recall the experience we had over approximately five years, in the time before we commenced our shipments, we engaged in a lot of meetings. Everything from the governor of Nebraska -- at that time, Governor Kerry. I remember meeting personally with him prior to our shipments to talk about the preparations and responsibilities of various parties. We dealt with the Nebraska legislature. We dealt with governors in other states along the route. A lot of public officials. We dealt with mayors. We dealt with city councils, because this does generate a lot of local interest.

...3 When we reflect back on that, we also spent a lot of time working with emergency response personnel at the state level, coordinating with state emergency response personnel and working with local responders to teach them what was really involved in responding to any kind of an accident scenario. And that is critical. It has to be done early, it has to be done thoroughly, so that those officials understand what they may be facing.

I think what we found out is after we'd completed the campaign, we had a high degree of confidence among all of those people about the integrity of the container, about the risk associated with it being quite small -- and, again, the track record has proven that.

It's important, though, to have this communication so that all of these people do understand how to deal with the situation should it arise and what the various capabilities are of the various parties in responding.

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Finally, I'd like to point out I live in Columbus, Nebraska. Columbus is on that UP main line. NPPD's headquarters are about three blocks from the main line. I am confident that if that material is coming through Columbus, we will be safe. Because I believe that the practices of shipping at the regulations, the integrity of the containers, all do an excellent job of protecting public health and safety.

So I think it's time, in summary, that we look at these lessons not only from us in transportation, but from others who have had similar campaigns, we take lessons learned from those and apply them to the future, and that we move forward as expeditiously as is prudently possible to develop the final repository for spent nuclear fuel.

Thank you very much.