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OCT 1 - 2001

John C. Courtney
Certified Health Physicist
10723 Oakline Drive
Baton Rouge, LA 70809-3315

September 18, 2001

Dr. Lake H. Barrett
Acting Director, OCRWM
U.S. Department of Energy
Washington, DC 20585

Dear Dr. Barrett:

Thank you for the invitation to comment on the decision on opening Yucca Mountain to receive spent nuclear fuel and high level radioactive waste. Based on my review of the technical data provided over the last fifteen years, it is my opinion that this facility can meet all of the safety and environmental criteria to which it is subject. The Yucca Mountain facility should be opened as soon as possible.

All of the objections that have been raised to Yucca Mountain have poor technical bases. None of the critics of this facility have proposed reasonable, let alone better, alternatives for sequestering highly radioactive materials. The specter of an accidental criticality within the site raised a few years ago has been readily discredited. Confinement criteria to assure that radiation levels are raised in this remote area are based on the "Linear - No Threshold Hypothesis" which is inapplicable to the projected increases in local radiation fields. While there is seismic activity in the general area of the repository, the engineered storage packages and natural characteristics of the site are more than adequate to assure public safety and to protect the environment.

About twenty years ago, one of my colleagues and I conducted an extensive review of the safety of transporting radioactive materials. Our conclusion was that such operations present little or no risk to the public or to the environment. Packaging of the materials to be transported is robust and can survive even severe accidents or deliberate actions. Transportation plans to deliver radioactive materials to Yucca Mountain are detailed, logical, and more than adequate to assure safety and environmental protection.

The events of last week aptly demonstrate the importance of nuclear fission to national security. Further development of nuclear energy can lessen our dependence on fluid hydrocarbons imported from areas that harbor hostility to the United States and other nations. Safe sequestering of highly radioactive materials generated by energy

production, research, and defense activities is a vital part of the entire nuclear fuel cycle. Prompt opening of Yucca Mountain would demonstrate to the world that the nuclear fission fuel cycle is a viable alternative to fossil fuels for the production of electricity, and that the high levels of radioactive materials that are produced can be managed safely.

Opening the repository at Yucca Mountain, Nevada has my unqualified support. None of the objections to the facility raised by its critics has technical merit. In my opinion, the care and detailed planning associated with this project along with the inherent characteristics of the site allow the operation of a safe facility. It would be a vital part of our plans to increase the economic and national security of the United States. I would be happy to respond to any questions from your office or any member of the public regarding this important issue.

God Bless America!

Sincerely,



John C. Courtney
Professor Emeritus of Nuclear Engineering
Louisiana State University
Baton Rouge, LA