Stop making it! Stop making high-level radioactive waste!

I would like to point to the work of two of my board members at Beyond Nuclear.

Kay Drey in St. Louis, Missouri has been an anti-nuclear activist for nearly 40 years. In 2002, she wrote a pamphlet entitled "A Mountain of High-Level Radioactive Waste 60 Years High." [see: http://www.nirs.org/factsheets/mountainofwaste.pdf ] Of course, we now have to update it for 2012 to say "70 Years High."

In it, she pointed out that: "Radioactive waste has been accumulating for [70] years, and we don't even know what to do with the first cupful."

Our colleagues at Nuclear Energy Information Service in Chicago -- about to celebrate their 30th anniversary, by the way -- inform us that Enrico Fermi's radioactive wastes (resulting from the first self-sustaining chain reaction in a prototype reactor at the University of Chicago on December 2, 1942 as part of the Manhattan Project that led to the atomic bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki) were buried under a simple mound of dirt in the Palos forest preserve in the southwestern suburbs of Chicago. A bicycle path passes close by. There is nothing preventing a family from having a picnic right on top of it. This is not a good thing!

Dr. Judith Johnsrud, also on the Beyond Nuclear board, has been an anti-nuclear activist for nearly 50 years. She refers to high-level radioactive waste as a "trans-solutional problem." That is, a problem beyond a solution, a problem with no solution -- no good solution any way, just "lesser evils."

"The Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future" is, ironically enough, an appropriate name for this panel. It is not appropriate for this panel to promote decades or centuries of more atomic energy as it has been doing, given the unsolvable radioactive waste problem. But that's the appropriateness of the name, for high-level radioactive waste IS the future of nuclear power.

The U.S. Environmental Protection Agency has acknowledged a million years of hazard associated with high-level radioactive waste under its Yucca Mountain dump regulations. Of course, this does not account for longer lasting radioactive isotopes, such as Iodine-129, with 157 million years of hazardous persistence. What is the future nuclear power gives us? It is high-level radioactive waste, deadly forevermore. That is the "gift" we are leaving for countless thousands of future human generations.

I first got involved in these issues in early 1993, when the Palisades nuclear power plant near my lifelong home in southwestern Michigan proposed to store high-level radioactive waste on the beach of Lake Michigan, 100 meters from the water that serves as the source of drinking water for tens of millions of people downstream in the U.S., Canada, and a large number of Native American First Nations.

I attended an anti-nuclear rally calling attention to this dangerous proposal, and the first words I heard, from Michael Keegan of Don't Waste Michigan and the Coalition for a Nuclear-Free Great Lakes, were:

"Electricity is but the fleeting byproduct of atomic reactors. The actual product is forever deadly radioactive waste."

Another powerful quote I heard early in my anti-nuclear career came from Winona LaDuke, Ojibwe environmental activist. She said, on an Honor the Earth musical concert tour educating the public about nuclear power and radioactive waste issues, and their impacts on Native American communities:

"The best minds in the nuclear industry have been hard at work for over 50 years trying to find a solution to the radioactive waste problem. And they finally have found one: haul it down a dirt road and dump it on an Indian reservation."

I begged and pleaded at the first meeting of the Blue Ribbon Commission, in March 2010, that you not target Native American communities for "parking lot dumps." But the BRC's advocacy for "consolidated interim storage" could very well do just that. After all, the U.S. Nuclear Regulatory Commission approved a construction and operating license for a "parking lot dump" for 40,000 metric tons of irradiated nuclear fuel on the tiny Skull Valley Goshutes Indian Reservation in Utah, despite determined opposition by half the tribe, not to mention the State of Utah, the Utah U.S. congressional delegation, and nearly 500 environmental and environmental justice groups across the country. Targeting Native communities for parking lot dumps is shameful environmental injustice, radioactive racism.

What is America's nuclear future? There should be no future for nuclear power after the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe.

Although the Fukushima nuclear catastrophe moved Germany to announce a nuclear power phase out by 2022 -- even the industrial giant Siemens recently announced its exit from the nuclear power business -- it did not happen overnight. The decision was built on 35 years or more of anti-nuclear organizing at the grassroots level in Germany. For example, the protests and blockades against high-level radioactive waste shipments at Gorleben. A year ago, the biggest ever protest took place -- 50,000 people blocking roads with their bodies, chaining themselves to the train tracks. This could very well happen in the U.S., if the nuclear establishment insists on rushing into risky high-level radioactive waste transportation, for no good reason whatsoever.

We do not need nuclear power. Germany, the fourth largest economy on the planet, is showing the way. It does not plan to import French nuclear electricity, nor Eastern European coal fired electricity, to replace its nuclear power plants. Germany plans to replace its nuclear power with efficiency and renewables, while also meeting strict Kyoto climate targets regarding fossil fuel greenhouse gas emissions.

We can do it here too. Dr. Arjun Makhijani of the Institute for Energy and Environmental Research wrote the book "Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free: A Roadmap for U.S. Energy Policy" in 2007. His thesis is that we can phase out both nuclear power and fossil fuels from the entire U.S. economy by 2040 -- not only from the electricity sector, but also from transportation and all other energy use sectors -- by replacing them with renewables such as wind and solar, as well as maximized efficiency. He argues that we can do this affordably -- for the same percentage of our gross domestic product we currently spend on

expensive fossil fuel imports, and dirty, dangerous and expensive nuclear power -- and no further technical breakthroughs are needed.

To conclude, for the radioactive waste that already exists, we need hardened on-site storage, to better fortify it against attacks, safeguard it against accidents, prevent it from leaking into the environment for the decades it will inevitably remain at the reactor sites.

For the radioactive waste that does not yet exist, we need to prevent its production in the first place. The only real solution for radioactive waste is to not make it.

Thank you.