

Feb. 3, 2010

Press Statement by Kevin Kamps, Radioactive Waste Watchdog, Beyond Nuclear

Regarding Major Moves by the Obama Administration to End the Yucca Mountain High-Level Radioactive Waste Dump Proposal

Contact Kevin Kamps via cell (240) 462-3216 or email at kevin@beyondnuclear.org

Press Statement by Kevin Kamps:

“President Obama has fulfilled a major campaign pledge by zeroing out the Yucca Mountain Project’s funding in his Fiscal Year 2011 budget request to Congress. Energy Secretary Chu has moved to withdraw the Energy Department’s license application to the Nuclear Regulatory Commission within the next month, with no option for its re-submission at a later date. For keeping this wise promise to cancel the geologically unsuitable Yucca Mountain radioactive waste dump, the Obama administration deserves our thanks.

So do Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid, former U.S. Senator Richard Bryan, U.S. Representative Shelley Berkley, and many more Nevada leaders, especially the State of Nevada Agency for Nuclear Projects, who have stood strong to reverse the injustice of the 1987 “Screw Nevada Bill.” Yucca Mountain was singled out in the first place due to raw politics, not sound science. Yucca Mountain is an active earthquake zone, at risk of volcanic activity, and would have massively leaked any radioactive wastes buried there into the drinking water supply below, as well as the air above.

But not only does the cancellation of the Yucca Mountain dump represent an environmental victory, it represents an environmental justice victory. The “peace and friendship” Treaty of Ruby Valley of 1863, signed by the U.S. government and the Western Shoshone Indian Nation, recognizes the Western Shoshone land claim to Yucca Mountain. Such Western Shoshone groups as the Western Shoshone National Council, the Western Shoshone Defense Project, the Shundahai Network founded and led by Western Shoshone spiritual leader Corbin Harney (1920-2007), and bands such as the Timbisha Shoshone Tribe in Death Valley, worked tirelessly for over two decades to protect their sacred lands at Yucca Mountain from radioactive waste dumping.

Well over 1,000 grassroots and national environmental groups also worked to oppose the Yucca dump for more than 20 years. The cancellation of this risky plan has also avoided many thousands of “Mobile Chernobyls” and “dirty bombs on wheels” -- shipments by road, rail, and waterway through most states of hazardous high-level radioactive waste, vulnerable to being released by accident or attack.

Nearly 63,000 metric tons of commercial irradiated nuclear fuel now exists in the U.S., enough to have filled Yucca Mountain to its legal limit. Thus, even if the Yucca dump had opened, a second national dump in another state would have been needed to accommodate radioactive wastes generated from now on, excess to Yucca's capacity.

Now that the Yucca dump has been cancelled, more than 50 years after commercial atomic reactors first started up in the U.S., we still have no solution for the forever deadly radioactive wastes they generate. Highly radioactive wastes remain stored on-site at the atomic reactors, vulnerable to accidents, attacks, or eventual leakage that could result in catastrophic releases of harmful radioactivity to the environment.

The wastes that already exist must be hardened on-site, secured against attacks, safeguarded against accidents, and protected against leaks. Over 150 grassroots and national environmental groups have signed a Statement of Principles for Safeguarding Nuclear Waste at Reactors, endorsing hardened on-site storage as an interim improvement upon current indoor pool and outdoor dry cask storage.

Environmental groups must remain vigilant, as the nuclear power industry and its supporters in government push for other dirty, dangerous and expensive radioactive waste proposals. The U.S. national nuclear labs, along with the French government owned atomic giant Areva, have lobbied for high-level radioactive waste reprocessing, which risks nuclear weapons proliferation, environmental and public health devastation, and astronomical costs for taxpayers. Former U.S. Senator Pete Domenici, now appointed to Energy Secretary Chu's blue ribbon commission on radioactive waste policy, has pushed for "centralized interim storage" that risked establishing de facto permanent "parking lot dumps" by Energy Department dictate, overruling state governors and attorneys general. Such radical proposals would make the radioactive waste dilemma much worse, not better.

Yucca's cancellation shows more clearly than ever that we need to phase out nuclear power, stop generating forever deadly radioactive wastes for which we have no solution, and replace dirty, dangerous, and expensive uranium-generated electricity with safe, clean, and affordable energy efficiency and renewable sources such as wind and solar power."

--30--

Beyond Nuclear aims to educate and activate the public about the connections between nuclear power and nuclear weapons and the need to abandon both to safeguard our future. Beyond Nuclear advocates for an energy future that is sustainable, benign and democratic.

--

Kevin Kamps
Radioactive Waste Watchdog
Beyond Nuclear
6930 Carroll Avenue, Suite 400
Takoma Park, Maryland 20912
Office: (301) 270-2209 ext. 1
Cell: (240) 462-3216
Fax: (301) 270-4000
kevin@beyondnuclear.org
www.beyondnuclear.org