

**Statement by  
The Honorable  
David Wright  
Co-Chairman  
Yucca Mountain Task Force  
&  
Commissioner  
South Carolina Public Utility Commission**

**June 21, 2006**

As we approach the mid-point of this year and the final months of the 109th Congress, we find the clock ticking on the Yucca Mountain project and pending legislation – the Nuclear Fuel Management and Disposal Act. At the same time, the investment by America’s electricity consumers in the Yucca Mountain project is mounting on a daily basis.

America’s contribution to the Yucca Mountain project now stands at more than \$28 billion – including direct contributions and interest – and is escalating at a pace of more than \$4 million a day.

Information that we are distributing today shows contributions by 42 states to the Nuclear Waste Fund. In the case of Illinois, this contribution is over \$3.5 billion; it is close to \$2.5 billion for the State of Pennsylvania. Other members of the billionaires club include Virginia, New York, North Carolina, New Jersey, Florida, Georgia, California, Alabama and South Carolina.

Notwithstanding this enormous investment, potential damage claims in the billions and billions of dollars, the pivotal importance of Yucca Mountain to new nuclear plants and mounting domestic energy costs, the US Department of Energy continues to operate without a schedule for Yucca Mountain – although the project is now nearly 10 years behind its original schedule of 1998 for initial spent fuel and high-level waste acceptance.

Despite the swirl of national energy, economic, environmental and national security issues -- and up to a dozen new nuclear plants hinging on forward progress on Yucca Mountain -- legislation to address fundamental structural requirements of the Yucca Mountain program remains pending in the House and Senate energy committees.

This legislation advances important provisions to ensure the successful licensing, construction and operation of the Yucca Mountain facilitate – and common sense reforms of the Nuclear Waste Policy Act such as lifting the statutory 70,000 metric tons capacity to postpone the need for a second repository indefinitely. Of particular importance to those of us who are the stewards of ratepayer contributions to the Nuclear Waste Fund, the legislation provides a “funding fix” to facilitate access to this fund in a budget-neutral manner.

The future is clearly now for Yucca Mountain program. We urge the Congress to begin consideration of the important reforms – advanced by the Bush Administration and introduced by Senator Domenici and Chairman Barton in the Senate and House, respectively – this summer. To date, there has not been a legislative hearing on these bills and it is time to begin a discussion, dialog and debate on the important issues with regard to moving the Yucca Mountain program forward. We also urge the Senate to mirror the House of Representatives’ action to provide full funding for the Bush Administration’s request of \$544.5 million for the Yucca Mountain program with an additional \$30 million to advance interim storage.

At the same time, we urge the Department of Energy to issue its long-awaited updated timetable and strategy for the Yucca Mountain program and submittal of a licensing application on an urgent basis or no later than the end of this summer as promised. We have every indication that the Department is committed to this pledge and under the leadership of its new director, Ward Sproat, we believe that this commitment can be brought to fruition.

Let me add that there has been a great deal of focus and attention recently on the Global Nuclear Energy Partnership otherwise know as GNEP, particularly its relationship to Yucca Mountain. We think that relationship is very clear. Yucca Mountain is the imperative for GNEP – not the other way around. In other words, GNEP cannot move forward without Yucca Mountain. A national repository is essential even in a closed fuel paradigm. We agree with Senator Domenici that we must “move forward” with Yucca Mountain while pursuing a recycling component without any delay to the Yucca Mountain program and that “there are legislative actions we can and should take to further the progress of the program.”

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