

Statement of Kevin Kamps, Beyond Nuclear
to Blue Ribbon Commission on America's Nuclear Future,
November 16, 2010, Washington, D.C.

Chairmen, Commissioners, it's an honor and a privilege to have been asked by a community of 167 national and grassroots environmental and public interest groups across the U.S. to speak on their behalf before you to convey their strongly held conclusions about radioactive waste management.

I'd like to begin by thanking President Obama and Energy Secretary Chu for their wise decision to cancel the proposed Yucca Mountain, Nevada dumpsite for high-level radioactive waste. This geologically unsuitable site, which belongs to the Western Shoshone Nation by treaty rights agreed to by the U.S. government, should have been declared unsuitable long ago.

I'd also like to take this opportunity to thank President Obama for his Women's History Month Proclamation of March 2009, in which he honored Native American environmental justice activist Grace Thorpe. President Obama proclaimed: "Grace Thorpe, another leading environmental advocate, also connected environmental protection with human well-being by emphasizing the vulnerability of certain populations to environmental hazards. In 1992, she launched a successful campaign to organize Native Americans to oppose the storage of nuclear waste on their reservations, which she said contradicted Native American principles of stewardship of the earth. She also proposed that America invest in alternative energy sources such as hydroelectricity, solar power, and wind power."

In addition to adamant opposition to reprocessing, and a call for isolation of radioactive wastes from the living environment for as long as they remain hazardous, the main message I bring you today, from the 167 groups which have signed onto the "Answers to Key Blue Ribbon Commission Questions" document, is that the only real solution to the radioactive waste problem is to stop making it. For the 63,000 metric tons of commercial high-level radioactive waste that already exist in this country, an interim first step to address dire safety and security risks is hardened on-site storage, wherever feasible. Nuclear weapons facilities must devote all resources to exhuming, treating, containing, and isolating from the environment decades-old radioactive wastes, particularly high-level liquids and sludges, and completely end development of new nuclear weapons. Any centralized interim storage, and the transport associated with it, should only be undertaken to enhance safety, security, public health, and environmental protection. Anything less would represent a highly risky radioactive waste shell game on our nation's roads, rails, and waterways, for no good reason whatsoever.

(Stop Making It)

High-level radioactive waste has been accumulating for 68 years, since Fermi first split the atom during the Manhattan Project, and we don't even know how to safely and soundly manage the first cupful. Electricity is but the fleeting byproduct from atomic reactors. The actual product is forever deadly high-level radioactive waste. We need to stop making it.

As of spring, 2010, enough irradiated nuclear fuel and high-level radioactive waste had been generated in the U.S. to completely fill the now-cancelled Yucca dump to its legal limit, at least until a second dump was opened in the East. But the 104 operating commercial reactors annually churn out an additional 2,000 to 3,000 metric tons of irradiated nuclear fuel, all of which, from now on, is

excess to the first national repository's capacity to accept, necessitating a second dump. The Nuclear Regulatory Commission, over the past decade, has rubberstamped 59 of 59 applications from nuclear utilities for 20 year license extensions at aged, deteriorated reactors. In addition to the safety risks of such decisions are the 20 to 30 metric tons per year of additional irradiated nuclear fuel that will be generated at each license-extended reactor. Now there is talk of 80 years of waste generation at these reactors.

In addition, between 2007 and 2009, NRC docketed 26 applications for new reactors. If licensed, financed by transferring most of the financial risk onto U.S. taxpayers and/or ratepayers, actually constructed, and operated, these reactors would add to the mountain of radioactive waste nearly 70 years high at this point. Incredibly, the Department of Energy signed contracts with nuclear utilities proposing 21 new reactors, transferring ultimate liability onto American taxpayers. When were these contracts signed? The waning days of the George W. Bush administration, beginning on Nov. 4, 2008 – the very day Barack Obama was elected president – and ending on January 22nd, 2009 -- two days after he took the oath of office.

How do we stop making it? Arjun Makhijani's 2007 book, *Carbon-Free and Nuclear-Free: A Roadmap for U.S. Energy Policy* shows the way. It showed that by 2050, not only nuclear power but also fossil fuels can be phased out of the U.S. economy and replaced with energy efficiency and diverse forms of renewable sources, such as wind, solar, many others. This can be done affordably and with no further technological breakthroughs required. Dr. Makhijani has since revised his findings, that this can be accomplished by 2040. In fact, Mark Cooper of Vermont Law School reported in 2009 that rather than build 100 new atomic reactors, the U.S. could provide the same electrical end-product for as much as \$4 trillion less via efficiency and renewables.

(Hardened On-Site Storage, HOSS)

Storage pools densely packed with irradiated nuclear fuel at reactor sites are one of the most potentially catastrophic safety and security risks in the U.S. Whether due to accident or attack, the loss of pool cooling water could result, in a matter of hours, in a radioactive waste inferno releasing more hazardous radioactivity than was released by the Chernobyl nuclear catastrophe. The overall objective of hardened on-site storage should be that the amount of radioactivity releases projected in even severe attacks should be low enough that the storage system would be unattractive as a terrorist target.

Operating pools must be hardened, or fortified, and transitioned to open-frame, low-density storage. But current on-site dry cask storage is far from good enough. Dry casks, stored in the open air, in plain sight, were not designed nor manufactured with terrorism in mind, leaving them vulnerable to attacks as well. In addition, very serious quality assurance violations have taken place with both the design and manufacture of currently deployed dry casks, as well as the pads upon which they sit. For such reasons, periodic review of HOSS facilities and fortified pools should be required. Funding should be dedicated to enable local and state governments to independently monitor the sites. The signatories to the current Answers document feel so strongly that HOSS should be implemented as soon as possible that they have endorsed use of the Nuclear Waste Fund to do so, even though the nuclear utilities that generated the irradiated fuel in the first place, not ratepayers, should be held responsible and liable.

Originally proposed by the safe-energy community in 2002, hardened on-site storage is now one of the widest points of consensus among communities impacted by nuclear energy – and supported by

those near nuclear weapons production sites as well. Unfortunately, to date this proposal has been largely ignored by the industry, its regulators, and elected officials. A position statement, “Principles for Safeguarding Nuclear Waste at Reactors,” itself signed by 170 groups, has been delivered to you today.

(Centralized Interim Storage)

Winona LaDuke, an Ojibwe environmental justice and anti-nuclear leader, has quipped “The greatest minds in the nuclear field have been hard at work for over fifty years in search of a solution to the radioactive waste problem, and they’ve finally found one: haul it down a dirt road and dump it on an Indian reservation.” And Keith Lewis, a Serpent River First Nation environmental defender from near the uranium mines and mills of Elliot Lake, Ontario, said “There is nothing moral about buying out somebody who is starving.” As President Obama himself indicated by honoring Grace Thorpe, such environmental injustice must be stopped once and for all. Parking lot dumps for irradiated nuclear fuel, as licensed by NRC at the Skull Valley Goshutes Reservation in Utah, as promoted by DOE’s Nuclear Waste Negotiator David Leroy at Mescalero Apache Reservation in New Mexico, and as yet being pursued at Native American reservations as we speak by the nuclear power utilities, are intolerable. Nearly 450 national and grassroots groups indicated just that in a statement declaring Private Fuel Storage at Skull Valley unacceptable five years ago.

In addition to the hazards of the back-end of the uranium fuel chain being targeted at low income and people of color communities, often so too are the hazards of the front-end of the uranium fuel chain. Uranium mining proposals are currently threatening not only the Grand Canyon’s indigenous inhabitants, the Havasupai, but also sacred Mount Taylor, as well as Navajo Indian Country, despite the Navajo tribal council’s clearly stated law banning any and all uranium mining, milling, and processing activities on its land. Thus, the phasing out of nuclear power, and its replacement with efficiency and renewables, will end such environmental injustices at the front-end of the uranium fuel chain as well.

(Transportation)

Shipping irradiated nuclear fuel by truck, train, and barge has been described by phrases such as “Mobile Chernobyl” and “dirty bombs on wheels.” Again, irradiated nuclear fuel shipping containers were not designed with terrorist attacks in mind, and their questionable structural integrity raises serious concern about their ability to withstand severe accidents as well. The movement of such potentially catastrophic hazards through major population centers must only occur when it improves safety, security, and the protection of public health and the environment.

In conclusion, on behalf of 167 national and grassroots environmental and public interest groups, I emphasize the urgent need to safeguard and secure the high-level radioactive wastes currently stored at reactor sites in hardened on-site storage as an interim measure. I emphasize the wisdom of phasing out dirty, dangerous and expensive nuclear power, and replacing it with safe, secure, ever more cost effective, and truly clean efficiency and renewables. This will also benefit environmental justice, which also demands that the lands and communities of indigenous peoples never again be targeted by the most hazardous stages of the uranium fuel chain, from uranium mining to radioactive waste storage and burial.