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SOUTHWEST RESEARCH AND INFORMATION CENTER • TRI-VALLEY CARES •
UNION OF CONCERNED SCIENTISTS • WAND (WOMEN'S ACTION FOR NEW DIRECTIONS) •
WESTERN NORTH CAROLINA PHYSICIANS FOR SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY •
YORK COUNTY (SC) GREENS • YGGDRASIL (EARTH ISLAND INSTITUTE)

Attention: Appropriations Staffer

January 19, 2007

Senator Robert Byrd
Representative David Obey
Chairmen, Appropriations Committees
U.S. Congress
Washington, DC

**Eliminate Funding for DOE's Plutonium Fuel (MOX) Program,
Support Plutonium Immobilization**

Dear Chairmen Byrd and Obey,

As you assume the chairs of your respective Appropriations Committees and address budget issues under the continuing resolution (CR) for Fiscal Year 2007, we are writing to express our strong support for the elimination of the Department of Energy's (DOE) costly plutonium fuel (also called mixed oxide or MOX) program now being considered for the Savannah River Site (SRS). In addition, we want to affirm support for a significant increase in funding for the program to immobilize the U.S. ex-weapons plutonium stockpile with high-level radioactive waste.

Given the extreme constraints imposed on the FY 2007 budget by the CR, major savings can be made by eliminating the MOX program, which may be the most expensive single project now being managed by DOE. The proposed MOX plant alone is estimated to cost around \$4 billion, and given DOE's poor track record, the costs are sure to rapidly escalate over the coming years. By eliminating the long-troubled MOX program, efforts can now be focused on the immobilization of plutonium at SRS, which according to DOE's own past estimates would be cheaper than MOX for handling all excess plutonium.

The nation cannot afford to pursue both immobilization and MOX. Since immobilization is suited to dispose of both pure and impure plutonium, while the MOX option is not, the choice of immobilization as the right path forward is clear. Moreover, immobilization also poses fewer environmental and proliferation risks than the MOX option.

As you know, the Republican-controlled House voted last year to eliminate the MOX program, but the Senate failed to act on this matter. We recognize the wisdom of this bi-partisan decision by the House and suggest that you take it into full consideration during your decision-making process. The budget for MOX should be zeroed out for FY 2007 and a shut-down of the MOX program should be funded from unspent prior-year balances. In the final FY 2007 Appropriations language, we urge you to state that DOE should immediately begin to terminate the MOX program, halt efforts to begin construction of the MOX plant at SRS, and choose immobilization as the preferred option for plutonium disposition. This decision should also prevail in your deliberations on the FY 2008 DOE budget which is soon to be presented to Congress.

Pursuit of a U.S. MOX program for the last ten years has failed to have the intended impact of leading to the development of a parallel program in Russia. The G-8 has refused to fully fund the Russian MOX plant, the Russian Duma has failed to ratify the liability agreement. Further, the Russians have affirmed that they have no interest in a parallel program using MOX in their light-water reactors and instead are pushing for construction of a costly new plutonium breeder reactor, the BN-800, which they hope the U.S. will build for them under the auspices of the misguided and stumbling Global Nuclear Energy Partnership (GNEP).

As a coalition of national and regional groups concerned about good government, the environment, the economy and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, we have been deeply troubled by DOE's blind pursuit of the problem-plagued MOX program despite clear warning signs of its impending failure. We hope that you will now take the opportunity to restore close oversight over this expensive program and take action to guarantee that DOE quickly gets on with immobilization of surplus plutonium at SRS.

We thank you for taking our views into consideration and look forward to your making the sound fiscal decision to eliminate the MOX program once and for all.

Sincerely,

Glenn Carroll
Coordinator
Nuclear Watch South
(formerly GANE)
Atlanta, GA

Tom Clements
International Plutonium Campaign
Nuclear Watch South
Atlanta, GA

Dr. Edwin S. Lyman
Senior Staff Scientist
Union of Concerned Scientists
Washington, DC

To respond to this letter or if you have questions about plutonium disposition issues and/or concerns about the program in the SRS region, please contact Glenn Carroll, Nuclear Watch South, P.O. Box 8574, Atlanta, GA 31106, 404-378-4263, atom.girl@mindspring.com

Attachment: additional signatories

cc:

Senator Thad Cochran, Ranking Member, Senate Appropriations
Rep. Jerry Lewis, Ranking Member, House Appropriations
Rep. Peter Visclosky, Chair, Energy & Water Subcommittee
Rep. David Hobson, E & W Subcommittee

NATIONAL GROUPS

Susan Gordon
Director
Alliance for Nuclear Accountability
Seattle, WA

Jim Riccio
Nuclear Policy Analyst
Greenpeace
Washington, DC

Kathleen Gwynn
President & CEO
Steven and Michele Kirsch Foundation
San Jose, CA

Thomas B. Cochran, Ph.D.
Director, Nuclear Program
Natural Resources Defense Council, Inc.
Washington, DC

Paul Leventhal
President
Nuclear Control Institute
Washington, DC

Michael Mariotte
Executive Director
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Washington, DC

Danielle Brian
Executive Director
Project On Government Oversight (POGO)
Washington, DC

Michele Boyd
Legislative Director, Energy Program
Public Citizen
Washington, DC

Susan Scher
Executive Director
WAND (Women's Action for New Directions)
Arlington, MA

LOCAL & REGIONAL GROUPS

Roger Herried
Abalone Alliance
San Francisco, CA

Adele Kushner
Executive Director
Action for a Clean Environment
Alto, GA

David Matos
President
Aiken Peace
Aiken, SC

Rochelle Becker
Executive Director
Alliance for Nuclear Responsibility
San Luis Obispo, CA

Bobbie Paul
Executive Director
Atlanta WAND
Atlanta, Georgia

Janet Zeller
Executive Director
Blue Ridge Environmental Defense League
Glendale Springs, NC

Jane Williams
Executive Director
California Communities Against Toxics
Rosamond, CA

Allison Peeler
Carolina Peace Resource Center
Columbia, SC

Kathryn Kuppers
Charlotte Area Green Party
Charlotte, NC

Peggy Maze Johnson
Citizen Alert
Las Vegas, Nevada

Deb Katz
Citizens Awareness Network
Shelburne Falls, MA

Kay Cumbow
Chair
Citizens for Alternatives to Chemical Contamination
Lake, MI

Keith Gunter
Citizens' Resistance at Fermi Two
Monroe, MI

Michael J. Keegan
Coalition for a Nuclear Free Great Lakes
Monroe, MI

Joni Arends
Concerned Citizens for Nuclear Safety (CCNS)
Santa Fe, NM

Alice Hirt
Don't Waste Michigan
Holland, MI

Ruth Thomas
President
Environmentalists, Inc.
Columbia, SC

Lisa Crawford
President
Fernald Residents for Environmental Safety & Health, Inc.
Harrison, OH

Molly Johnson
Area Coordinator
Grandmothers for Peace, San Luis Obispo County Chapter
San Miguel, CA

Paige Knight
President
Hanford Watch
Portland, OR

Jennifer O. Viereck
Director
HOME: Healing Ourselves & Mother Earth
Tecopa CA

Greg Mello
Los Alamos Study Group
Albuquerque, NM

Steve Leeper
US Representative
Mayors for Peace
Atlanta, GA

Elaine Nichols
NoNuke Coalition
Tallahassee, FL

George Crocker
Executive Director
North American Water Office
Lake Elmo MN

Mary Olson
Director of the Southeast Office
Nuclear Information and Resource Service
Asheville, North Carolina

Jay Coghlan
Executive Director
Nuclear Watch New Mexico
Santa Fe, NM

Mavis Belisle
Peace Farm
Panhandle TX

Don Richardson, M.D.
Physicians For Social Responsibility
Brevard, NC

Bruce A. Drew
Steering Committee
Prairie Island Coalition
Minneapolis MN

Jeremy Maxand
Executive Director
Snake River Alliance
Boise, ID

Brett Bursey
South Carolina Progressive Network
Columbia SC

Sara Barczak
Safe Energy Director
Southern Alliance for Clean Energy (SACE)
Savannah, GA

Don Hancock
Southwest Research and Information Center
Albuquerque, NM

Marylia Kelley
Executive Director
Tri-Valley CAREs
Livermore, CA.

Lewis E. Patrie, M.D.
Chair
Western North Carolina Physicians for Social Responsibility
Asheville, NC

Gregg Jocoy
York County SC Greens
Rock Hill, SC

Mary Davis
Yggdrasil, a project of Earth Island Institute
Lexington, Kentucky