



THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF NEVADA

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TESTIMONY

NUCLEAR WASTE TECHNICAL REVIEW BOARD Transportation Panel November 19, 1990 Reno, Nevada

Mr. Chairman, members of the panel, my name is Abby Johnson. I am speaking today on behalf of the League of Women Voters of Nevada. I am the immediate past president of the state League, and presently serve on the state board of directors as the natural resource chair.

The League of Women Voters has had a long standing interest in the nuclear waste issue at the national level, which has included the publication of the Nuclear Waste Primer and a project two years ago to convene regional meetings on nuclear waste. The League is also committed to an open process with full public involvement in the siting of nuclear waste facilities.

Here in Nevada, League members are deeply concerned about the Yucca Mountain project. We believe that the selection process that led to Yucca Mountain was based primarily on political science rather than geology or hydrology.

The reason we are testifying today, however, is because of our interest and concern in the process that this board is using in holding public hearings. Congress has asked this panel to be the watchdog for DOE, and Nevadans have high hopes that the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board (NTRB) will take every opportunity to question the DOE to ensure that public health and safety are protected now and in the future.

I was present on October 15 for the environment and public health panel of the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board and was greatly dismayed at its conduct. I personally found the process of interrogation of members of the public to be intimidating -and my impression was confirmed by a newspaper article in the Carson City Nevada Appeal about the hearing, "Scientific panel challenges Nevadans' objections to nuclear dump". I wish to make this clipping part of my testimony and have it entered in the record of the Board.

At the hearing on October 15, members of the public were cross examined, belittled, and lectured. Members of the panel requested the educational credentials of those who testified, leaving the impression that the testimony of those without a scientific background or those without higher education would be discounted. It is my opinion that members of the public and those who are not being paid to testify at the hearing should be treated with respect and deference. Members of the public are entitled to their opinions even if members of the NTRB do not agree with them.

The concerns that we have regarding the public hearings of the NTRB are related to perception and credibility, two problems that you may find yourselves sharing with the Department of Energy. I realize that this is not the panel that conducted the previous hearing here in Reno and that only ^{one} two individuals from that panel are also on this panel. However from the standpoint of the public, the panels are the NTRB. If one panel mistreats members of the public, the entire Board will have that reputation, deserved or not. We would like to send a message back to the full board that the conduct of each panel reflects on the credibility of the entire board.

My comments related to transportation also deal with perception and credibility. For years, the DOE has been unwilling to face up to the many weaknesses in its transportation program, the most evident being that it proposes to move the waste over 2,000 miles from its origin. As with other aspects of the Yucca Mountain project, the public's concerns about transportation need to be addressed. The public must be confident that the DOE knows what it is doing, that DOE has public safety as a top priority. The public knows how many things can go wrong - in the design and construction of casks, in the systems that will be designed to ensure that the waste is packaged, loaded and shipped properly, and in the precautions that must be taken to ensure that drivers and the public do not receive exposure to levels of radiation from the casks. The point we want to make is that even if all these factors can be addressed and done right, without public confidence, the DOE will not be able to succeed in its mission at Yucca Mountain.

To summarize, the DOE lacks credibility with the general public. One of the purposes of this board is to bring credibility back to the DOE by performing a watchdog function. If the board is perceived by the public as an agent or partner with DOE, the board loses credibility. Without credibility, the project will fail. It is in the self-interest of this board, DOE and the utilities to have public hearings that do not intimidate the public. We encourage the Board to review its processes so that the public will be encouraged to engage in productive dialogue with the Board in the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to address the panel. Are there any questions?

Scientific panel challenges Nevadans' objec

By ED VOGEL
Appeal Capital Bureau

RENO — An independent scientific panel Monday challenged objections of Nevada citizens concerned about the potential nuclear dump in Yucca Mountain.

Speaker after speaker found their anti-dump statements questioned by members of the Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board.

When Carson City resident Gerald Prindiville complained the dump will be built in an active earthquake zone, panel member John Cantlon countered that Hoover Dam is in the same zone. He said modern engineering can make projects safe from potential earthquake disasters.

Cantlon also objected when Prindiville suggested the dump could turn into an American version of the Soviet disaster at Chernobyl.

In addition, panel chairman Melvin Carter said "independent monitors" outside the "federal establishment" can inform Nevadans if they question the honesty of statements about Yucca Mountain made by the U.S. Department of Energy.

Carter made the response after Ann Stanton of Caliente said rural Nevadans have not trusted the government since the days of atmospheric atomic testing at the Nevada Test Site.

"They were told 'Just trust the government. They will take care of you,'" Stanton said. "A lot of them have cancer today."

Stanton added that people in Caliente believe that the Energy Department will tell them Yucca Mountain is safe even if it isn't.

The Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board was created by Congress after Yucca Mountain, 110 miles northwest of Las Vegas, was

singled out as the only site for study as a national nuclear waste repository.

The U.S. Department of Energy seeks to house more than 70,000 tons of high-level nuclear wastes in the underground repository. Wastes generally would be spent nuclear fuel from nuclear power plants in the East.

The waste panel, composed of university professors, is charged with independently reviewing the work of the Energy Department.

In an interview, both Carter and Cantlon denied they deliberately were trying to refute arguments advanced by Nevadans.

Instead Cantlon said he asked questions "to illuminate" the points being made by the citizens. About 50 residents showed up at a casino meeting room and generally blasted the move to place the repository in Nevada. Many speakers

were veteran anti-dump activists.

"We have been very critical of the DOE," Carter added. "We aren't critical of these folks."

He said he was aware of the overwhelming opposition of Nevadans toward the nuclear dump. Statements by the audience may be used in a future report to Congress prepared by the board, he added.

Cantlon said he sought to bring out obvious inaccuracies by the speakers.

For example, he said there is no way that the repository ever could have a disaster such as the problem at the Chernobyl power plant in the Soviet Union.

"We don't build them that way," Cantlon said. "The repository, built below ground would provide substantially better containment (of radiation)."

One speaker who fended off questioning by the panel was Wil-

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tions to nuclear dump

liam Rosse, representative of the Western Shoshone Tribal Council.

Rosse said he considers all of Yucca Mountain "sacred," and his tribe opposes Anglo intrusion.

Cantlon responded by asking Rosse to consider how similar Indian sites have been disturbed in heavily populated states. Carter asked Rosse to think of the benefits of nuclear energy, such as generating "20 percent of our nation's power."

In response, Rosse said nuclear energy was no benefit. He said he has been to Las Vegas and "driven dizzy by all the lights."

"They are smart enough to send a man to the moon, but not to neutralize this monster (spent nuclear fuel)," he added.

As during past public hearings,

Rosse maintained Yucca Mountain lies within lands of his Indian nation. He contended the federal government acknowledged Yucca Mountain was Shoshone when it approved the Treaty of Ruby Valley in 1863.

The U.S. Supreme Court, however, has ruled against the Indians and a claims commission has awarded the tribe \$26 million for its claims. The tribe refuses to accept the money.

Carter is a professor of nuclear engineering at Georgia Tech and a former director of the Environmental Protection Agency's National Environmental Research Center in Las Vegas. Cantlon, dean of the graduate school at Michigan State University, received his bachelor's degree at the University of Nevada, Reno.