

**Congress of the United States
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515**

**Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Energy and
Mineral Resources**

**Committee on Energy and Commerce
Subcommittee on Energy
and Power**

July 29, 1993

**Dr. John E. Cantlon, Chairman
Nuclear Waste Technical Review Board
1100 Wilson Blvd., Suite 910
Arlington, VA 22209**

Dear Dr. Cantlon:

Thank you very much for your very helpful testimony and that of Drs. Allen and Price at our July 1 joint hearing on the status of the high-level radioactive waste program. As we hope we conveyed at the hearing, the Board's contributions to the waste program have been invaluable.

To assist the Subcommittees in preparing a more complete record, we request that you provide responses to the enclosed written questions from members of the Subcommittees. Please submit your responses to Dean Tousley of the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources staff at 818 O'Neill HOB, and to Wesley Warren of the Subcommittee on Energy and Power staff at 331 Ford HOB, by August 23.

Sincerely yours,

**Richard Lehman, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy
and Mineral Resources**

**Philip Sharp, Chairman
Subcommittee on Energy
and Power**

**enclosures: Questions from Chairman Lehman
Questions from Rep. Vucanovich
Question from Rep. Hastert**

**Post-Hearing Questions for the NWTRB
submitted by Chairman Lehman**

1. You state that the management & operations contractor for the program is not being used as effectively as it could be.
 - a) How could the M&O contractor be used more effectively, in your view?
 - b) To what extent, if any, do you think the M&O contractor contributes to the excessive emphasis on program infrastructure which you cite?
2. What is the appropriate degree of technical conservatism in a program of this kind? Is it appropriate for the program to embrace a higher degree of conservatism than is considered technically necessary in order to help address the public acceptance problems of the program?
3. In your *Special Report*, you noted that other factors beyond DOE's control could also contribute significantly to further delays in program progress.
 - a) Could you provide us with some insights to the kind of technical or institutional problems that could occur?
 - b) Are the kinds of delays you would expect in terms of years or decades?
4. Your *Special Report* states that the waste package is a key component of the waste management system, and several earlier reports urged DOE to place greater emphasis on this component of the waste system. Contrary to your recommendations, DOE has reduced funding for R&D in this area for the last 3 years.
 - a) Please discuss what effect this strategy could have on overall safe disposal of nuclear waste.
 - b) In your view, what degree of reliance would be appropriate to assign to a robust, long-lived waste package when planning the overall repository design?
 - c) Is the current NRC standard requiring a 300 to 1,000-year period of substantially complete containment of waste in the waste packages adequate?

QUESTIONS TO THE NWTRB FROM BARBARA VUCANOVICH

— In the Report you say that "Safely storing spent fuel does not appear to present any serious technical problems ... The Board has long advocated the development of alternative container concepts." Does this mean the Board would support on-site storage as an acceptable alternative to an interim nuclear waste facility until a high level waste repository is built ?

— In your testimony, you indicate that "attempting to meet these unrealistic deadlines (1998 and 2001) ... could cause licensing problems, increase overall program costs and ultimately delay the program."

Could you please explain what the licensing problems might be, and particularly what the extent of delay in the program would result ?

— What do you mean in your testimony that "DOE's repository development schedule may not allow sufficient time to complete these [heater] and other essential scientific tests." What are the heater tests and what type of delay might result in the lack of flexibility in the DOE schedule ?

— Given your criticisms of the DOE program, what type of independent review do you envision of the DOE program and who do you suggest conduct such a review ?

— In the Report, you say "unrealistic deadlines also are forcing the DOE to undertake activities simultaneously that might better be conducted sequentially." What's the impact of this statement on the Board's confidence in the DOE's scientific activities at Yucca Mountain ?

Congressman' Dennis Hastert

QUESTION FOR NWTRB

Q. It has been suggested that the Department of Energy should postpone work on the Yucca Mountain site characterization pending a comprehensive review of the high-level waste program. Wouldn't this simply further delay the program in Nevada?